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Parish Church of St Mary, Richmond, North Yorkshire

Richmond Bell Renewal and Preservation

Our project aims to preserve and safeguard the physical heritage of Richmond's five historically significant bells (1500-1739), promote the cultural heritage of bells and bellringing, and make a lasting difference to community engagement with the heritage of bells and bellringing. Our project seeks to:

- Conserve, and rehang five bells of historic significance (1500 to 1739) in a permanent exhibition sited in the 14th century tower, that will be unique in England. It is designed to attract tourists and ringers nationally; to bring visitors to the grade II* listed church as part of Richmond's heritage offerings and to help beginner ringers understand the heritage of bellringing.
- Create better access to heritage using modern media including webcams and monitors, creating film and sound recordings to highlight the role of bells in the soundscape of modern Richmond, cataloguing, storing and indexing historic artefacts, papers and photographs in the tower, creating a digital archive.
- Involve the public in learning about heritage through: school workshops ;public lectures and demonstrations; researching written and oral sources; open days and two temporary exhibitions.
- Increase the numbers and skill levels of bellringers in Richmond and the Upper Dales

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The Society of Bellringers of St Mary's Parish Church exists to further the practice of the heritage activity of bellringing in Richmond and its locality. We train bellringers and develop awareness and understanding in the local community of the role of bellringing in the everyday life of the town and its contribution to the soundscape of Richmond past and present. We have 24 active members and are affiliated to the Yorkshire Association of Change Ringers.

For almost 60 years we have been recognised as a teaching hub for ringers from Richmond and neighbouring districts in an area where there are few ringing resources. We teach people to ring

from ab initio to more advanced and welcome young and old, of all faiths and none, from the locality and wider afield including visitors from across the UK and overseas.

We practise twice a week and serve the community and the church by ringing for services including weddings and funerals, local and national events, civic occasions. St Mary's church is an important community resource that hosts concerts, flower festivals, recitals and exhibitions. Regular activities include services, discussion groups, church choir, community choir, WI, and meetings of "The Friends".

Our project focuses on four main aspects of heritage:

The culture and skill of bellringing in Richmond, at risk locally and nationally because of declining numbers of ringers: The skills of bellringing today are essentially identical to when full-circle, scientific bellringing was started in England and when the Ancient Society of College Youths ringers was founded in London in 1637. A significant milestone was the 1668 publication *Tintinnologia* followed nine years later by *Campanalogia*, which laid down "plain and easie Rules for Ringing all sorts of Plain Changes". The ways in which we move the bells, the music generated, the changes rung, the hardware used, are in most part exactly the same as that used in the 1600s and 1700s save for refinements of materials and technology.

The sound of bells is deeply rooted in British culture, providing a soundtrack to key moments in individual, civic and national life since the Middle Ages. In Richmond, the bells have been rung for Mayor making, Guild Services and other town events for centuries. Our earliest written records are C19th. By 1811, ringing for 'public notice' was taking place on 6 bells: documents record £3.3.0d paid to six Richmond ringers for ringing on Mayday 1811; 15 shillings for ringing the 'whole day' on November 5th 1822 and the same on January 29th 1822 for the King's Accession. We still ring them for all major town and national events. Local people have commented on the importance of the bells to them: 'the bells are such an important part of Richmond'; 'we love the bells, our whole house runs to the timing of the bells' but many people have no idea that the heritage of bellringing is at risk, especially in rural areas like Richmond.

The number of ringers nationally increased in the 1950/60s but then declined until the "Ringing in the Millennium" project when a £3m Lottery Grant led to training, bell restoration and augmentation projects. Since then, the ringing of church bells has again declined (CCCBR conference 2011, *Ringing World*, 22/03/2015). Bellringing is a complex psycho-motor skill that also requires the learning and application of rules and structures for permutations of the number of bells (Methods). These characteristics create challenging and rewarding opportunities for team-based learning and achievement, and in turn a requirement for developing leaders with advanced bellringing knowledge and skills; they also mean that bellringers require lengthy training and commitment: the team must be built over time.

The first true peal (an extent of ringing with over 5,000 different variations) recorded at Richmond was in 1900, followed by a number of peals and performances in 1902 to mark the coronation of Edward VII, the end of the Boer War and the safe return of the Yorkshire Regiment from South Africa. Support in the 1950s from National Service bellringers at Catterick Army Camp, and the arrival of expert ringers in 1979, have made Richmond a training hub for Upper Dales towers for almost 60 years. We have an established reputation for teaching bellringing that attracts ringers from nearby towers to attend our practice nights in an area where there are very few teaching towers.

Five historic bells

Five of our eight bells have been identified as worthy of preservation by the Church Buildings Council. They date from 1500 to 1739. They are of interest to bellringers nationally and to the general public who are unable to view them currently.

The oldest bell (c1500) is of particular interest because of its age and because it is thought to originate from Easby Abbey being rescued with the choir stalls and misericord at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries (The History of Richmond, in the County of York, Christopher Clarkson 1821 p. 167). The Gothic script inscription UNUS DEUS SED TRINITAS includes the shield of Seliok, bellfounder (Nottingham), who cast other bells in Yorkshire, including another of the same date in Trinity Chapel, Richmond, around the same time possibly in the church grounds. Its shape is more tubular than modern bells. We shall hang this bell for chiming as a sanctus so that it continues to be heard outside the church.

Three bells cast in 1697 by Samuel Smith of York are inscribed “Venite Exultemus Domino”; “Cantata Domino Canticum Novum” ; and “Gloria in Excelsis Deo”. They have particularly fine decorations (see photographs).

The inscription on the final historic bell reads: “1739. The Gift of the Right Honourable Sir Conyers D’Arcy, Knight of the Bath, Member of Parliament for Richmond, Lieutenant of the North Riding of Yorkshire, Comptroller of his Majesty’s Household and one of his Privy Councillors”. Also inscribed are the D’Arcy arms and “Tria juncta in uno” the motto of the Order of the Bath possibly referring to the 3 kingdoms of the United Kingdom or the Holy Trinity, as well as the name and shield of the bellfounder E. Seller of York. Conyers D’Arcy’s portrait by Joshua Reynolds in York Art Gallery shows him to be a man of some importance who lived in Aske Hall now the residence of the Marquess of Zetland, one of our patrons.

Our project aims to retain and hang these bells in a publicly accessible, permanent exhibition in the Bellchamber that shows the history of bells, bellmaking and bell ringing in Richmond from 1500. The inscriptions and decorations on these bells are currently inaccessible because of the poor design of the frame which makes it impractical and dangerous to view them. Our project will enable them to be seen close to, appreciated and enjoyed by all, for the first time.

Bells and bellringing records, artefacts and memories

Documents and artefacts in the belfry record peals rung to celebrate the coronations, deaths and anniversaries of 5 monarchs, the safe return of regiments, the end of wars and the passing of millennia. Wooden boards on the belfry walls record these events and more recent ringing for the millennium, music festivals, the Olympics, the Tour de France, the anniversaries of VE and VJ day, the Magna Carta, the recent visit of Her Majesty the Queen as well as civic, guild, and military occasions. We have a list of First World War ringers in Richmond and the regiments in which they served; photographs of National Service ringers and others, some of whom we know are still alive who can inform us about ringing in Richmond in the 1950s; minute books and papers.

These artefacts and documents are uncatalogued but provide an interesting source of heritage information about Richmond ringers, town celebrations and historic events that has been inaccessible to the general public and local history researchers. The condition of these artefacts is generally good but in need of more effective storage in archival boxes and similar, and in need of cataloguing, indexing, disseminating and linking to the records held in the Richmondshire and the Green Howards Museums.

The Tower of the 14th century Grade II* Church

The church of St Mary the Virgin Richmond is Grade II* listed. A church, first mentioned in a charter of 1125-30, has stood on the site for nearly 900 years. Earliest remaining parts of the church date from C12 to early C15, English Heritage noted the tower (1399) as a key feature contributing to the designation of the church. The rest of the Church was substantially restored and rebuilt in 1858-59 by Sir George Gilbert Scott.

The Perpendicular three-stage tower has diagonal buttresses with gabled offsets, and embattled parapet. In the lower stage is a four-light west window. The 2nd stage has a small narrow west window and clock on the north face. Two-light belfry openings have transoms and louvres. A shield with the Nevill arms is on the west side of the crenallated parapet. The height of the tower arch shows that the medieval church was lofty, and squinches in the belfry suggest a spire was intended. Our project will explore and highlight the significance of the Grade II* church and the 1399 tower in which the bells hang.

The needs and opportunities our project will address

There is a national decline in the number of people skilled in the heritage activity of bellringing. For years Richmond has been a hub teaching and sustaining ringing in the Upper Dales; to continue this we must maintain a strong and capable band of ringers in Richmond tower, otherwise the heritage skill of bellringing will be at risk locally.

We need to:

- attract new ringers,
- improve the skills of existing ringers, most of whom are learners,
- attract more new recruits of all ages, especially young people, through more effective outreach into the local community. 60% of our current band is aged 60+; only three are under age 18.

A key factor in training bellringers is the ease with which the bells can be rung by beginners and intermediates. For many years the 'go' of the bells at Richmond has been deteriorating because, as reported in 1922, the wooden six bell frame is "...not properly designed and constructed, and oscillates under the swing of the bells, especially the top framework... which is very unstable indeed". Movement is now marked, placing unacceptable stresses on the 14th century tower of the Grade II* church and making the bells harder to ring. Four bellhangers and founders have each advised that immediate action is required, to replace this frame with a cast-iron frame housing 8 bells on one level. As the existing bells cannot be fitted into a single tier frame we must replace them.

We have responded to the urgency of this situation by establishing a Bell Restoration Committee and have secured £135,000 in donations/pledges towards casting new bells sized specifically for a single tier frame that will safeguard the tower structure. Fundraising for the new frame and bells is complete and the bells are being cast at the John Taylor and Co. bell foundry in Loughborough during November and December 2016.

The new frame and bells will enable us to teach beginners more easily. However, the starting point for safeguarding the tower was local commitment to ensuring that bells continue to ring from the C14 tower at Richmond. Community involvement and a programme of activities to create knowledge, awareness and engagement in the heritage of bells and ringing are essential to our purposes.

We need to:

- involve more local people in the heritage of bellringing

- increase people's understanding and appreciation of the heritage of bells and ringing and the contribution that it has made and continues to make to the history, daily life, heritage, customs and traditions
- of the town and its inhabitants
- work with schools to engage young people in heritage

Moreover, we have five bells of historic note that are significant artefacts in their own right and an important component of the heritage of the 1399 tower. Their retention in Richmond is threatened by the requirement to hang 8 new bells for ringing.

We need to act now to: use the opportunity of the installation of eight new bells to retain our five bells of historic significance in their heritage location of Richmond tower make them publicly accessible in a permanent exhibition with an interpretative display as part of our communication with the public and as an additional heritage site linked to others in the town. This will be a unique installation in England, opening-up heritage, enabling people to view bells close up, learn how they are made, hung and swung, and understand the technology and practices of bells and ringing. The bells are currently inaccessible for inspection and investigation by any other than the agile and brave. We want to remove this barrier to engaging close-up with heritage and bring to the public heritage that previously has been hidden.

Within the tower we have artefacts, papers and photographs that are un-researched and poorly managed. The ringers, their activities and the bells, are a strand in Richmond's history that is not linked into the town's heritage story. The history of bells, ringers and ringing in Richmond is not researched or documented, yet we know that many of the ringers were tradespeople; the bells have always been rung, and still are, to mark national and local events but these activities are not recorded, documented or made accessible other than in the belfry. Our collection offers new insights into Richmond's heritage.

We need to:

- safeguard, catalogue, store and index it,
- inter-link it with records elsewhere,
- unlock the potential of the artefacts and papers in the ringing chamber, making them available to
- others and encouraging local people to engage in documentary and oral-history research and disseminate new insights based on this collection.

Opportunities

The dismantling, conservation and rehangings of the five old bells and the casting and hanging of new bells offers opportunities to work with school students and professionals to create a film and sound record of the project processes, including recordings of the five historic bells sounding within the current ring of 8 and in different locations in Richmond creating a record of the bell-soundscape as it has sounded for the last 100 years: as the individual bells have sounded for as long as 500 years, during the Georgian town's heyday, and in 2016.

This will provide an unusual insight into the role of bells in the soundscape of the town. We will also produce a short art-film and film sequences to support the exhibitions making information about bell heritage accessible to all.

The make-up of our current ringing team provides an opportunity to capitalise on their skills and time that we should seize now. Among our numbers are:

- Chairman, past Chairmen, Ringing Masters of Cleveland and N Yorkshire branch of Yorkshire
- Association of Change Ringers,
- representatives on the Central Council of Church Bellringers,
- members of the Ancient Society of College Youths (founded 1637) and the Ancient Society of
- Cumberland Youths (founded 1746/7),
- three members signed up as Association of Ringing Teachers,
- retired ringers with experience, skill and time to drive a project of this size and scope, as evidenced by the energy and commitment already given to raising money for the new bells and frame.

Our work to date has generated great interest and support across the community providing an opportunity to capitalise on:

- backing from the local populace evidenced by their support of the appeal for new bells and frame and their attendance at promotional events,
- a groundswell of support and interest from the community driven by publicity around the fundraising for new bells and on which we can build to secure longer-term participation in workshops and opportunities to learn ringing,
- a strong community desire to understand and access the heritage of bellringing. The Station venue believe a bellringing heritage lecture will be hugely popular; the Civic Society have already hosted one lecture, one short written article and booked a new lecture in 2016/17.
- strong support from Richmondshire Museum to advise on the management of our artefacts and papers and develop local history research workshops,
- strong support from the Town and its Guilds to ensure ringing continues, and the traditions of ringing for civic and Guild events is maintained as an integral part of the overall town heritage,
- an overwhelmingly strong response from schools who see immense opportunities in the workshops we are offering to help students access and appreciate the heritage of bells, ringing and the church building; extend their knowledge and appreciation of heritage and its inter-relationship with their lives; and the opportunity offered to work with professional facilitators, receive support and information from them and explore and extend their students' studies through the lens of heritage.

The bells and their environment

We consulted four bellfounders to identify the most effective and long-term solution to the stresses on the tower and the 'go' of the bells; discussed their reports with the Diocesan Bell Adviser, Diocesan Church Architect and Parochial Church Council. All gave their support to taking action to safeguard bellringing and the tower. We secured a Faculty for the proposed works from the Diocesan Consistory Court. We investigated purchasing bells from redundant towers and registered with Keltek Trust, which assists churches to acquire surplus and redundant bells for English-style full-circle bellringing. No suitable ring of bells has become available since we first investigated the safeguarding of the tower and the movement of the bellframe two years ago. We therefore decided we had no option but to commence fundraising to cast eight bells bespoke to the size of the tower. We have raised a significant proportion of the money for the new bells and a new bellframe.

A driving purpose has always been to secure the culture and traditions of bellringing through outreach, to retain our five old bells, and create permanent and temporary exhibitions. This was

because to safeguard the cultural heritage we need public interest, understanding, commitment and enthusiasm for it.

We have consulted with:

- Richmondshire Museum Curator (Zoe Dodds), who wishes to support training of volunteer groups to record, document, and conserve our documents and artefacts, support wider documentary and oral research, and host a temporary exhibition summer 2018 on Richmond bells and bellringing heritage;
- an ex- Richmond Bellringer who is a freelance, award winning designer and workshop facilitator who, in consultation with us, has devised an outline programme of workshops, filming and exhibitions;
- Three primary and two secondary schools. Detailed consultations with Richmond School and Richmond Methodist School, to refine workshops around the heritage purposes and their needs have already resulted in their full commitment to participate with approximately 500 students. Led by professional facilitators, and supported by bellringer volunteers with DBS clearance, the workshops will explore four bellringing heritage themes: Bells and their buildings; Bells in society; Scientific ringing; Bells as musical instruments. The Station Richmond has agreed to host a temporary exhibition of the workshop outcomes.
- Richmond Civic Society and The Station Richmond who are both committed to including bellringing in their lecture schedule for 2016/17, enabling us to confirm these as part of our project outreach.

These consultations enabled us to shape our community and school outreach strongly, secure identified support for activities and build these into our project plan

Outcomes for our project

Our project has many outcomes, not least a brand new set of eight ringing bells for people to ring and listen to for hundreds of years. The installation of a completely new set of bells is a rarity and they will attract ringers from all over the UK to try them out and see what, if they can raise the money, they could aspire to in their own tower. However the heritage aspects of our project are as important to us as the new bells and in particular the project leads to a situation where:

- Heritage will be in a better condition. The five historic bells will be professionally cleaned, refurbished, rehung and safeguarded for the future.
- Heritage will be better interpreted, explained and accessed through school workshops, historical research workshops, talks to community groups, a publicly accessible, permanent heritage exhibition with our five historic bells, two temporary exhibitions, open days in the belfry, online materials on our website including film and sound, relating to heritage of bells, bellringing and bellringers.
- Heritage will be uncovered, identified, recorded and made accessible: historic material in the bellchamber will be catalogued and stored to professional standards, indexed, digitised and made publicly accessible for the first time via web and links with Richmondshire Museum; local history groups will uncover new information about bellringers in Richmond through written and oral history research.
- People will develop skills relevant to better management and communication of heritage by:
- participating in training for cataloguing, archiving; researching and writing about the heritage; working alongside workshop facilitators to identify aspects of heritage that will be used in workshops and exhibitions.

- People will learn about heritage in new ways, change their attitudes to bellringing and have enjoyable experiences through open days, lectures, exhibitions and workshops. They will better understand how the heritage of bellringing relates to their lives and the locality. Some will learn to ring.
- Many will volunteer time – to assist the bellhangers, the workshop practitioners, undertake research, organise and facilitate open days and events, be committee members and project managers. Most will gain new experiences and skills, enjoyment and fulfilment.
- More people and a wider range of people will engage with the heritage of bellringing enabling us to encourage a greater number and range of people to learn bellringing; outreach workshops, lectures and events will increase the numbers of people aware of the heritage and accessing it.
- We will engage a wide range and large number of the local community in our activities throughout the project. The local community will know more about bellringing, why it is relevant to themselves and others.
- The temporary exhibition in the Richmondshire Museum will attract visitors and be of interest; our bell exhibition will be a rich resource for anyone to access in person or through our website.