

THE BELLS OF ST GILES' CHURCH

LEIGH ON MENDIP

SOMERSET



REFURBISHMENT PROJECT

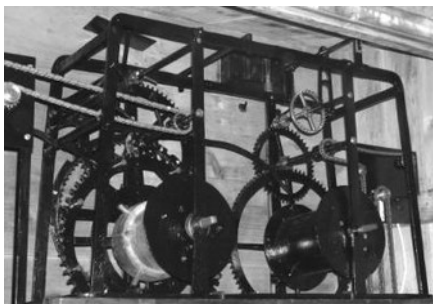
October 2016

Leigh on Mendip Church and Bells

St Giles' church is situated in the centre of Leigh on Mendip village between the Memorial Hall and the village school. It dates from around 1350 and was rebuilt around 1500. Leigh was a chapel of Mells until 1860.

The most prominent feature of St Giles' church is the 91' 6" (28m) tower. It was built of Doulling stone c. 1475-90 and has the most sophisticated decoration of all the Mendip churches. It is described by Pevsner as "A remarkable performance".

The ring of 6 bells dates to 1757 when they were cast by Thomas Bilbie of Chew Stoke. The bells were then rehung in 1858 in a new oak frame by John Warner and Sons of London, the 2nd bell was recast at this time (presumably the old bell was cracked). The bells were rehung again (but in the same frame) in 1910 by Llewellyns & James of Bristol and they also recast the 3rd bell.



As well as the bells the tower also contains an unusual faceless clock. The clock probably dates to the late 18th century and it was restored by Dr Marcus Barton in 2004.

The first peal on the bells was rung on 5th January 1901 and to date 23 peals have been rung at Leigh. A peal is 5040 changes and takes approximately 3 hours to ring. Some of the peals are recorded on peal boards in the ringing chamber like this one. Perhaps one of your family is listed here?



Details of the Bells

Treble: 29 ½" 4 ¾cwt D#

Mr CLARK KING & Mr WM FINNIEAR CH W 1757 T B

Second: 30" 5cwt C#

CAST BY JOHN WARNER & SONS LONDON 1858 (Royal arms) PATENT

Third: 31 ¾" 6cwt B

J.E. HONNYWILL VICAR H. CARY G.H. BANTING CHURCHWARDENS LLEWELLINS ~ JAMES LTD BRISTOL
RECAST 1910 FROM OLD BELL 1756

Fourth: 33 ¾" 7cwt A#

Mr CLARK KING & Mr WM FINNIEAR CH W 1757 T B F

Fifth: 37" 9cwt G#

Mr CLARK KING & Mr WM FINNIEAR CH W 1757 T B F

Tenor: 42" 12cwt F#

Mr CLARK KING & Mr WILLIAM FINNIEAR CH WARDENS
1757 T BILBIE FECITI TO THE CHURCH THE LIVEING CALL
AND TO THE GRAVE DOTH SUMMON ALL



The Current Situation

A ring of bells usually needs a major overhaul every 100 years and Leigh bells were last rehung in 1910. If we were to do nothing the bells would (despite our regular maintenance) gradually deteriorate and become increasingly difficult to ring and after 100 years without any significant renovation there is a growing risk of damage to the bells and even a catastrophic collapse (the bells weigh several hundredweight each). At present St Giles' bells are still ringable but for how much longer?

In order to keep the bells ringing for the next 100 years we are raising funds to have them rehung and have the fixtures and fittings replaced. The existing oak frame is still sound and we plan to retain it with some additional strengthening. The bells will be rehung on new roller bearings to replace the current plain bearings which will make them much easier to ring. The bells will also be retuned to improve their sound.

Once the bells themselves are removed they will have their crown staples drilled out. Crown staples were an old method of hanging a bell and consist of iron staples cast into the bronze bell metal. These iron staples can rust which could crack the bell due to expansion. We do not think any of the bells are cracked but we will not know for sure until they have been removed. If a bell is cracked it may need to be welded or even recast which could add a substantial amount to the costs.

Rehanging the bells will make them easier to ring which is good for teaching new ringers. To help with teaching we also hope to install sensors to allow the use of a computer-based ringing simulator, this will give us the option of training sessions without any external sound.

In order to minimise costs the bell ringers will be providing some labour during the bell restoration project.

Bellringing at Leigh

We have an active band of 8 local ringers and we often have visitors from other towers at our practice nights and sometimes to help with Sunday service ringing. As well as Sunday services we also ring for village events such as the Flower Festival, national events such as the Queen's Jubilee and also for weddings.



We are always on the lookout for new recruits so if you are interested please come along to one of our Tuesday night practices and find out more. Most Tuesdays we are at Leigh but 2nd Tuesday of the month we ring at Mells.

You do not need to be strong to ring a bell. Ringing is a sociable and mentally stimulating hobby as well as a form of gentle exercise. It is suitable for anyone from about 10 to 80+ years of age.

How can you help?

The full cost of the project has been estimated to be in the region of £40,000. Some of the cost will be covered by grants but we will have to raise a good deal of it ourselves.

You can help by donating to our bell fund or sponsoring a bell or other item of equipment. You can also help by attending our fund raising events and purchasing our tea towels, mugs etc.



Leigh on Mendip Bells Tea Towel - ideal for Christmas presents! Only £5.00.

Contact

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