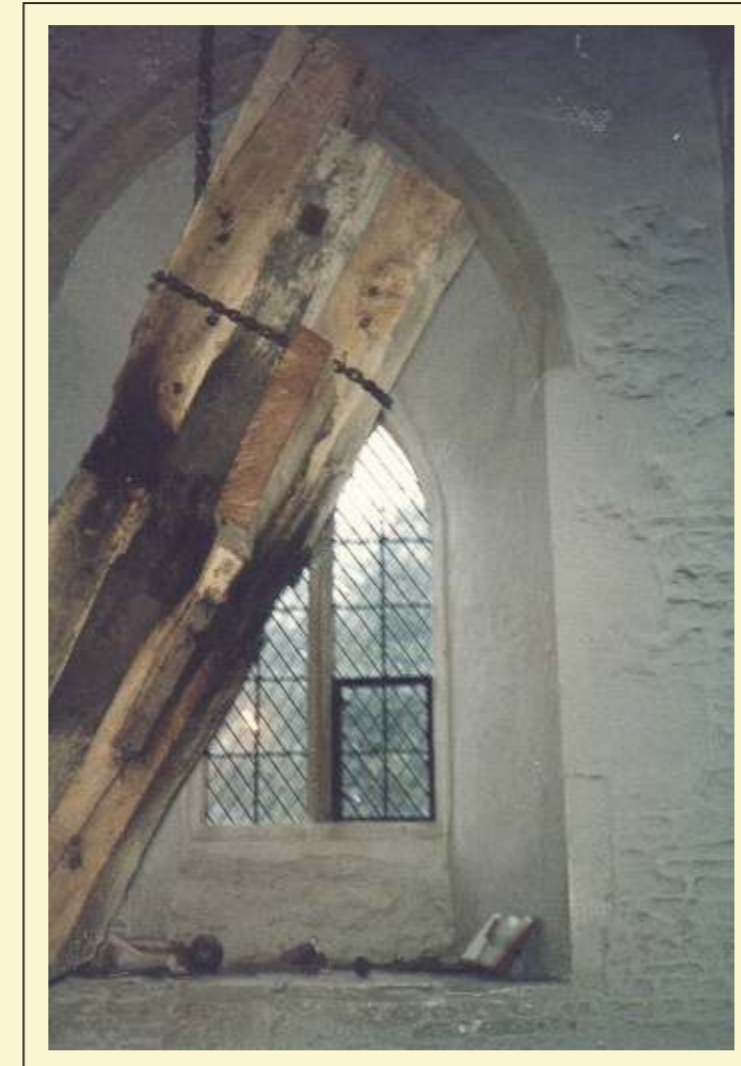


# THE BELLS OF STEEPLE ASTON

During the 1970s the state of the bell frame was a continual worry and was constantly being patched up by the tower keeper, Ron Knight. At that time there was a ring of six bells hanging in a massive oak frame fixed into the walls of the tower at its four corners. After examination of the condition of the woodwork the news was not good: something had to be done. The estimated cost was £24,000, an impossible amount to raise? Of course not. The restoration committee was supported by the church treasurer, David Armitage, and churchwarden, John Ray. The tower captain was Ron Gardner, and Dorothy had married an essential element of the project, Graham Clifton, a Great Tew ringer. The small band of bellringers organised fundraising events every month for three years and a start was made in early 1986.



The frame then had to be sawn up for removal. In the South West corner the oak had completely rotted away so that it was unattached to the wall. As the 45cwt of bells had swung in their various directions the entire frame had been lurching to an alarming degree. At the opposite corner the oak was as hard as steel; in fact when this area was attacked with an electric saw, sparks literally flew.

Fortunately a loophole was found to avoid the huge amount of tax that had been included in the budget, and this allowed the purchase of two new treble bells. Fortunately also, as the metal frame took up so much less space than the oak one had, a frame to house 8 bells had been constructed.



Here are the bellringing team celebrating after ringing the first peal, which takes two and three quarter hours, on the augmented ring of eight bells. Rev Michael Holland was on a 3 month exchange with Brother Alan Barnabas from Australia.



On 10<sup>th</sup> March the Jubilee bell arrived. So that everyone could have a close look it was taken round the village (above) before it was installed in the tower (below).



Much money was, and still is, raised from generous contributions from parishioners when the handbell ringers tour the villages at Christmas.



The metal from our old bell was recycled into the casting of a ring of Jubilee bells for the Queen's river pageant in June. This set was rung from the leading barge and has since been installed in Garlickhythe Church in the City of London.



In October the bells, the wheels, the fixings and the new cast iron frame were ready for collection.

By 2010 people there was much criticism of the Tenor bell and its lack of resonance. The more one listened the worse it sounded. This was the youngest bell having been cast in 1879. With the Queen's Diamond Jubilee coming up it was suggested that a replacement bell would be a fitting tribute; the PCC and PC agreed and plans were laid. Fundraising activities were organised and enjoyed once more. With grants included, the £14,000 was banked and the bell order placed.



On a bitterly cold day in February 1984 the local team borrowed equipment and lowered the bells to the ground.



On 27<sup>th</sup> January 2012, a group of bellringers and fundraisers went to watch our new bell being cast at Whitechapel Bell Foundry.



In 2015 it is the turn of the handbells to be restored. Sadly one of the original set of 12 bells is beyond repair and has to be replaced. At the time of writing they are still at Whitechapel. Hopefully they'll be ready for collection in time for Christmas.