

St George's Vernet-les-Bains Bells Project

Welcome to our second sponsors' and donors' update. I'm sorry it's taken so long. The first was sent out in early May. So much has happened since then; I've found myself waiting for each new development before sending out this update, and I'm thrilled to be able to tell you that we now have a clear timeline through to the first ringing of the bells for Easter.

Funding

The project couldn't happen without the money to pay for it, so let's start there. Since we began in January, we have raised over £91000. This includes roughly £700 to be donated to the Hollybank Trust on behalf of our Runners' Bell (see below) A massive thank-you to all those who have got us to this point. Our bill to Taylor's will be around £115000, so fundraising continues. We'll have a number of additional expenses to cover too, which means that we probably need to find something like another £30000. Financially, the project is secure though, since any shortfall at the time of settling our final bills has been underwritten with the offer of an interest-free loan. We have submitted a funding application France and the indications are that it will be at least partially successful. If so, it should make a big dent in the remaining balance.

Taylor's and Keltek

With enough in the bank to cover our first two of three payments to Taylor's, our contract for a complete new ring of ten, frame, fittings, ropes, building work, sound control and transport was signed in August. In the end, we decided, with some regret, not to use the two bells on offer from the Keltek Trust. They were of good quality, and will be well used elsewhere, but the feeling was that Taylor's could only do their best job given a completely free hand. Our new tenor is estimated at the same weight as our projected Keltek tenor (5-2-24 in C), but it will be slightly more compact, allowing for an improved frame design. St George's is a small tower, so every inch is significant. Also, because the bells won't be cast to match Gillett profiles, the trebles can be cast slightly heavier than originally projected.

Casting of our new bells begins this week. I'm sorry it wasn't possible to invite everyone to a casting, but places are limited by the Foundry. Around 140 guests will be present over the four sessions, including sponsors, donors, helpers, church members from St George's, and representatives of the French community in Vernet.

The bells

Details of the bells are:

- Treble: CATHERINE, in memory of Catherine Ladd, given by her family and friends .
- 2: LADY CONSTANCE, given by Bob & Wendy Ogden in memory of their daughter, Catherine. *'Lady Constance' was the name of the dinghy in which Catherine learned to sail. She took her name from Tim Brooke-Taylor's character in our favourite radio show, 'I'm Sorry, I'll Read That Again'. I'm delighted that Tim and his wife Christine, have accepted our invitation to be there when 'Lady Constance' is cast.*
- 3: TREVELYAN, given by Phil & Gwen Rogers in memory of Catherine Ladd. *Trevelyan was Catherine's college at Durham University*
- 4: ABBEY, given by Catherine's running and ringing friends.
- 5: HARRY, given by Michele Winter, Alan & Marj Winter and Owen Winter in memory of Harry Winter
- 6: DUNSTAN, given by Peter & Angela Newing. *Dunstan is the patron saint of bellringers.*
- 7: ROGER, given by Sue Green & Helen Illman with members of Leeds University Society of Change Ringers and the Western Branch of the Yorkshire Association, in memory of Roger Green.
- 8: DAVID, given by David Barrington in memory of his parents, Lancelot and Elizabeth Barrington. *DAVID will also be inscribed with the names of Rev David Burton Evans, who rescued St George's from disuse and formed an active Anglican congregation, and Rev David Phillips, our current priest, who took over from DBE when St George's was rededicated in 2011.*
- 9: BRANDON, given by members of Durham University Society of Change Ringers in memory of Catherine Ladd. *BRANDON takes his name from St Brandon's Church in Brancepeth, the home tower and church of DUSCR.*
- Tenor c5-2-24 in C: JEFF, in memory of Catherine, given by Jeff Ladd

Teaching a band

The aim is to teach a band of local ringers, both French and English, initially on the back six bells in time for the dedication. The timing of teaching depends on my presence in Vernet and that, in its turn, depends on Brexit. With the current uncertainty, my current thinking is to begin intensive teaching in August. As soon as my plans are firm, we'll need to get recruiting. I've already had some offers of help; if you'd like to get involved too and can teach to a good standard, please let me know. Anyone confident to teach in French would be a big help!

Dates

Here are the key dates, leading up to the dedication next September:

- 29th November: Casting of *LADY CONSTANCE*, *TREVELYAN* and *HARRY*
- 6th December: Casting of *DAVID* and *JEFF*
- 13th December: Casting of *CATHERINE*, *ABBEY* and *DUNSTAN*
- 10th January: Casting of *ROGER* and *BRANDON*
- Late January - February: Manufacture of frame and fittings
- Early March: assembly of the installation at the Foundry for testing and inspection
- Late March - mid-April: installation at St George's
- Easter Day, 21st April: first service ringing
- Sunday 29th September: Dedication Service and Festival of Bells in Vernet

The try-out and first ringing will be over Easter weekend. I'm sorry it's not possible to invite everyone. A limited number of invitations have been sent out recently and as replies are received, it may be possible to invite others.

I hope that as many of you as possible will come to the dedication weekend in September. Subject to the sound control being adequate, the plan is to have lots of ringing that weekend, including the first peal on the bells. Whilst the dedication is currently NOT planned to be 'invitation only', it would be helpful to have an idea of numbers, so we can, if need be, prioritise those who have contributed towards the success of the project. Please let me know if you're thinking about coming.

There may be odd bits of ringing between Easter and the commencement of teaching (August), so do let me know if you're going to be in Vernet at any time.

ABBEY

ABBEY is our Runner's Bell, about which I wrote last time. Abbey Runners and some of their members have very kindly donated towards the bell, which is also a fundraiser for the Hollybank Trust. If you're a runner as well as a ringer, please spread the word and ask your friends to either donate towards this bell or to support her by doing a sponsored run, or a Run'n'Ring. There are four events scheduled so far:

- 2nd December: Rachel Robinson and Kat Hobdell are running the Saltaire Reindeer Stampede, complete with bells.
- 15th December: I'm doing a Run'n'Ring Triathlon: a 5km run (my first Park Run), a handbell peal (Yorkshire Major) and a tower bell peal (Bristol Royal at East Retford)
- 2nd February: Northern Ireland Run'n'Ring, featuring the Ladd lads, and probably involving a peal and a marathon or something equally crazy.
- 28th April: Leeds Run'n'Ring, organised by Simon Kemp

ABBEY has so far attracted about £1400 of funding; we hope to raise a further £12500 for her, to be shared with Hollybank, so please encourage people to get those running shoes on! In particular, anyone who'd like to organise a Run'n'Ring event would be my friend for life. Since I last wrote, it's become clear that trying to steer all the events into one week in April wasn't going to work, so any date is fine if you'd like to help.

Finally:

Thank you so much to everyone who has supported the project, in whatever way. You've helped turn a dream into a reality.

Jeff, 27/11/18