

The Bells of St. Mary's Ring Out Again

After a silence of thirty two years, the bells of St. Mary's Church rang out again on Monday 7th of June when a service of rededication was held. Taking part were the Bishop of Crediton, Bob Evens, Reverend Mike Clark and Reverend John Carvosso, Chairman of Friends of St. Mary's Church, Atherington.

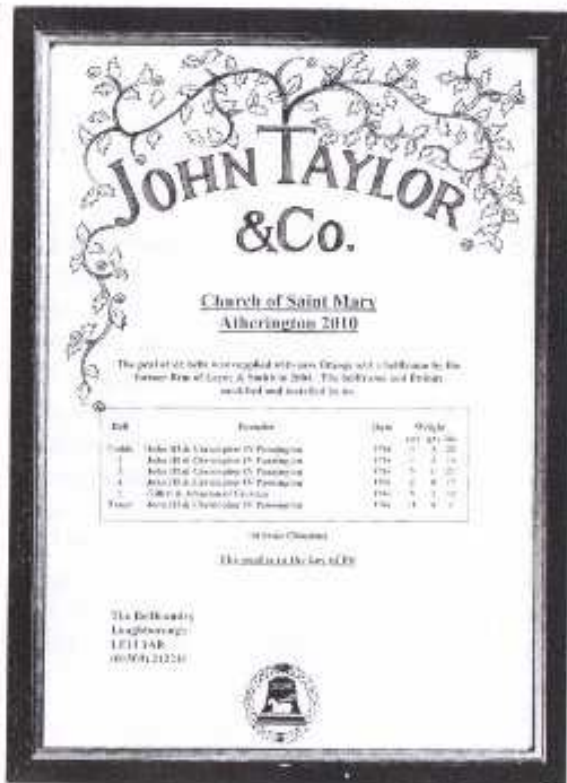
The church was full, with residents of the parish, people who had moved away returning for the special occasion and ringers from far and wide.

The last time the bells were rung was in 1978, some 32 years ago. Five of the bells were removed because the steel frames had to be replaced. The sixth bell was left in the tower.

Eayre and Smith started work in 2004 removing the old frames, taking away and refurbishing 5 bells. They supplied new frames and fittings which were then stored until work restarted when sufficient finance was available.

With £106,000 to raise, every effort was made to obtain as much grant aid and as many donations as possible. Every idea was explored and many coffee mornings, book and plant sales organised, to mention just a few. No stone was left unturned.

The Friends of St. Mary's Church, Atherington was formed in 2000 and became a registered charity in April 2005. Chaired by the Rev'd John Carvosso, they were active in every way to ensure full restoration of the bells. They made sure as many who wanted could volunteer their services, helping to keep costs down. John Carvosso will retire later this year.



Eventually, following completion of repairs by Messrs Carrick to strengthen the tower, overseen by Johnathan Rhind Architects of Barnstaple, and installation of new heavily galvanised steel beams, the bells were finally re hung by John Taylor & Co. of Loughborough in Leicestershire who had by then acquired the business of Eayre & Smith.

Throughout, the work involved the use of natural building materials supplied by Devon firm Mike Wye and Associates at Buckland Filleigh. Natural building materials take time to mature so five months passed before the bells could sound out once again. The weather vane at the top of the tower was also removed, repaired and refitted.



Monday the 7th of June was the day appointed for the Service of Rededication, to start at 6pm. John Taylor & Co. presented the certificate shown opposite.

The photo on the front cover shows the joyousness of the occasion and with a band of ringers from High Bickington the bells rang out across the parish once again. They were joined by many ringers from other churches who came from both near and far. And so it was, the bells rang out well into the evening.

Still, there is an outstanding amount of £10,000 to be raised, to pay off personal and other loans, so fundraising continues.

The first marriage to take place with the sound of bells was the very next Saturday when Jonathan Andrews and Susan Bowyer were wed. The next day bells sounded again when a band of ringers from Oxfordshire visited Atherington.



Ringers are now being sought, training to be provided. Anyone from 12 years upwards will be welcome. Contact Chris Hart in the Villager Shoppe for details.