

Relocating redundant church bells

Redundant bells can be transferred to churches where they will continue to be used, instead of languishing unused in a deconsecrated church or being sold for scrap.



The former church at Quarriers Village has been converted into apartments. The chime of bells was acquired by the Keltek Trust.

'Conservation by reuse' is the motto of the Keltek Trust. The trust has been in operation for less than 20 years but the concept of reusing bells has been practiced for centuries. One of the earliest known examples is in 1660 at St Deiniol, Hawarden, Flintshire, when John Scott of Wigan cast a replacement ring of six bells. Common practice at the time was to break up the old bells and cast their replacements from the metal. However, two of the old bells survived and were sold in 1661 to All Saints, Ledsham, West Yorkshire¹. Other examples include the transfer of the ring of six bells from Wellington old church, Shropshire, to the new church of All Saints in around 1790², and the transfer of the ring of six bells from the old church of Holy Trinity, Wentworth, South Yorkshire, to the new church in 1893. The old Wentworth church still exists and stands some distance away from its successor.

Prior to the 1970s there were two main routes for the relocation of bells. The first and most significant was the reuse of bells within the same diocese. This would usually be under the guidance of the diocesan furnishings officer. Bells were treated like other items of church furnishings, such as pews, and relocated accordingly. The second route was through the bell-founding and hanging trade. Bells were an asset, and if they could be reused intact it would save the founder money.

It is estimated that in the last 50 years over 2,000 Anglican churches alone have closed. It is not known



St John's Episcopal Church, Dumfries. Five bells from Quarriers Village are to be incorporated into the proposed ring of bells.

how many individual bells have been removed from churches, but comprehensive records do exist for rings of bells³. Between 1800 and 1949 there were just under 100 losses of rings of bells, a quarter of them were caused



The former church of St John, Bollington is to be converted to residential use. Chester Diocese Board of Finance has donated the bells and associated installation to St Thomas, Stockton Heath.

by enemy action during the second world war. Between 1950 and 1969 losses increased to almost four rings a year.

The large increase caused serious concern to bell-ringers. The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers⁴ (CCCB) formed the Redundant Bells Committee⁵ (RBC) in 1973. It was noted that the volume of closures

was such that many bells were being sold for scrap. Losses such as the smashing up in the tower of the useful ring of eight bells at Emmanuel, Clifton, Bristol, in 1976 led to the CCCBR launching its rescue fund in 1979. This became the third route for relocating bells, and a significant number of rings of bells have been relocated as a result. In 1997 the Kelttek Trust was formed with the charitable aims of relocating second-hand and redundant church bells. Although independent of the CCCBR, the two charities cooperate closely.

When a listed church closes, ecclesiastical exemption ceases and listed building consent is required to remove bells. Some closed churches of outstanding quality are vested in the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT) and current policy is the retention of bells prior to vestment within the CCT. The Kelttek Trust supports retention because the CCT has a policy of repair, restoration



Far left: Three of the four bells from the now demolished church of St Bartholomew, Ewood, Blackburn have been installed at St John the Evangelist, North Rigton, North Yorkshire. The remaining bell is awaiting installation at St Margaret, Broomfield, Kent.

The Bell Tower, Perth, Western Australia, is a working museum of bells and bell-ringing. It contains many examples of different types of bells as well as a ring of 16 bells, one of only three in the world.

and continued use of church bells. So far 341 churches have been vested in the CCT. Some closed churches continue to be used but with other faiths. For example, at St Saviour, Tor Mohun, Torquay, the former Anglican church has been adopted by the Greek Orthodox community. Closed churches which do not fit into the above categories are either converted for alternative use, such as Mount Zion church, Quarriers Village, Scotland, or as a last resort demolished, such as St Bartholomew, Blackburn.

Listed building consent to remove the ring of six bells from the former church of St Cross, Oxford, was refused in 2010. The reasons given were: 'The bells are considered to have such high historic association and interest as to merit preservation in the church that is their original setting. The removal would result in a reduction in the significance of the church as a heritage asset. The bells have high historic value intrinsically and as a full ring.' Had this reasoning been applied and accepted at other redundant churches, very few bells would have been relocated. Sadly, work to install library equipment for Balliol College has meant that St Cross's bells can no longer be rung.

One of the consequences of leaving bells in situ in churches converted for alternative use is that the regular quinquennial inspection no longer takes place and deterioration of bell installations may go unnoticed. This could result in bells no longer being used because of the high cost of repair. Another significant problem is that alterations made for a change of use can prevent the future removal of a bell or its fittings for repair. This

is a consideration frequently overlooked by architects.

The Keltek Trust believes that redundant bells should be transferred to churches where they will continue to be used, instead of languishing unused in a deconsecrated church or, worse still, being removed and sold for scrap.

On average there is a delay of several years between removal and installation elsewhere. Frequently bells need to be removed at short notice and there is insufficient time to find an alternative home. Even if an alternative destination is found, it is unlikely that the receiving church authorities could gain faculty approval and raise sufficient funds in time. The trust has overcome this problem by establishing a bell rescue fund, through which bells are acquired and put into storage until a suitable destination is found. In some cases the trust has stepped in with an interest-free loan to cover the removal costs. This happened at the former church of St John the Baptist, Bollington, Cheshire, where the ring of eight bells, complete with frame and fittings, was removed in 2011 in anticipation of their proposed relocation at Stockton Heath, Cheshire.

The majority of bells for relocation date from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Occasionally the trust relocates medieval bells. Recent recipients include medieval bells for display at the Weald and Downland Museum, Singleton, Sussex, and the Bell Tower, Perth, Western Australia. Since the trust's operations started, over 500 bells have been relocated and almost 100 more are in progress. The bell rescue fund has been used to acquire over 300 bells, 87 of which have been donated to worthy recipients.

References

- ¹ Bryant, D J and Dawson G A, (2010) *Church Bells of Yorkshire, Diocese of York, Part 3: The City and Ainsty*
- ² A list of transferred rings of bells can be downloaded from www.keltektrust.org.uk/downloads
- ³ A list of lost rings of bells can be downloaded from the same website.
- ⁴ See www.cccbr.org.uk
- ⁵ See www.cccbr.org.uk/redundantbells/

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