

Contribution to Faculty application for the installation of bells at St Mary's, Betws y Coed Prepared with guidance and input from professional bell hangers and ringers.

STATEMENT OF NEED

1. What is needed?

Installing bells and developing a local band of ringers is a major investment in time and money that, done well, will reap benefits for the church and the community for generations to come. It is a long-term investment for long-term benefit. In this 150th year of the consecration of the church it is an exciting project which will add to the appeal of an already much loved and well visited place of worship.

The proposal for St Mary's Betws y Coed is to take a ring of 8 bells and install them into the existing bell chamber in the tower of the church, with a potential option to augment them to a 12 at a later date.

The church of St Mary's, Betws y Coed is Grade II* Listed, being of special historical interest. It was designed by renowned church architects Paley and Austin of Lancaster, in 1873. It is built of grey and red sandstone, with slate roof, in a robust Transitional Gothic Revival and Arts and Crafts style. The massive tower was completed in 1907 and constructed with the intention of accommodating a ring of bells, complete with louvres, bell chamber and ringing chamber, meaning no significant architectural change to the fabric of the tower is needed.

Currently two potential sets of bells have been identified, both in need of rehousing due to their churches becoming redundant. An 11 cwt (i.e. the weight of the heaviest, or 'tenor' bell) ring of 8 from St John's in Porthmadog, and a 21 cwt ring of 8 from St John's Cleator Moor, in Cumbria.

Like all musical instruments, rings of bells vary in quality of sound, tone and ringability - how easy / hard it is to ring them. Cleator Moor bells are well known in the ringing world as an exceptionally good set of bells to ring. They are cast by Taylor's of Loughborough, they are of a 'classic' weight and tuning (heavier rings tend to be attractive to good ringers) and excellent tone and sound. The Porthmadog bells are smaller and would require re-tuning, and one recasting, to make them a viable proposition. The likely cost of the two rings reflects this difference in quality. Porthmadog's bells have metal value only whereas Cleator Moor are a ready-made high-quality instrument.

The Porthmadog bells need to be extracted from the church, transported to Betws and stored prior to the installation. The Cleator Bells have already been extracted and are currently in storage at Taylors' Bellfoundry in Loughborough. They will need to be purchased and subsequently transported to Betws prior to installation. It is possible that the Porthmadog bells, could augment the Cleator bells.

The bells will be installed in the bell chamber by a professional bell hanger. Following the report of Adrian Dempster from Ward Cole, the existing steels in the chamber need to be removed and a new steel subframe installed upon which a bell-frame will be constructed to house the bells.

Some minor changes are needed to the ringing chamber below from which the bells will be rung. The mobile telephone equipment will need to be screened for safety, and the large wooden clock case removed and new clock movements relocated to the rear of each clock face. Derby clockmakers have provided a guide price for this work. The current clock and mechanisms are in need of overhaul and repair, as such the hour chime is not currently working, nor are all the clock faces showing the same time. These works could be undertaken during the installation of the bells to allow for potential tower access through the clock window and through the bell hatch in the ceiling of the chancel.

2. Why?

As mentioned above, St Mary's tower was constructed with the intention of housing a ring of bells. Compared with similar areas of England, North Wales has a paucity of rings of church bells. The nearest to Betws being a ring of 8 at Holy Trinity, Llandudno and a ring of 6 at St Tegai, Llandegai. These proposals at St Mary's in Betws y Coed would compliment the existing, well regarded building with a set of bells to call people to worship and celebrate events both local and national. It would be a significant addition to the town. The parish also has a band of trained experienced ringers ready to ring from day one and eager to train new ringers to expand a dwindling community.

Benefits to the church:

- Bellringing will strengthen the church community – announcing services and drawing people to worship.
- An active tower will attract new people to the church
- Enhancing services of all kinds – bellringing before and after regular Sunday services, open ringing for weddings and half-muffled for funerals. It is a dramatic and beautiful sound.
- Ringing for special occasions – Saints' Days, Remembrance, national occasions, Dydd Gwyl Dewi, for example, is joyful and celebratory.
- It is likely to attract young people to learn. There is a Scout badge in bellringing, a large and successful group of scouts currently meets in the church hall at Betws-y-coed. The student bellringing community is lively and flourishing
- Develops a new community around the church – opportunity for parishioners, existing churchgoers and non-churchgoers, to learn a new skill and become involved with the church.
- Attracting ringers from neighbouring communities and across north Wales
- Peals and ringers' visits attract donations to the church.

Benefits to Betws Community:

- Ringers are drawn to bells – especially towers with 12 bells. This would attract groups of ringers to Betws-y-coed.
- Ringers stay over and support pubs, restaurants and hotels, and generally bring revenue to local shops and other businesses.
- A good ring of bells will attract visiting bands for outings and peals as often as local circumstances allow. Louvres can be engineered to retain the sound if need be.
- The sound of bells in Betws could be joyful for visitors and residents
- A good ring of 12 would be something to be proud of today, and an asset for future generations.

Benefits to Bellringing in Wales:

- This would be the only ring of 12 in North Wales. Betws would become a focal point for ringing across N Wales.
- A good ring of 12 would attract ringers to support a local, learning band.
- There could be great teaching benefits, and Betws is well-located to serve as a learning hub.
- There are likely to be other lapsed ringers who are drawn out of the woodwork!
- The prestigious annual National 12-bell Striking Contest is a big event and is hosted by a different church with a ring of 12 each year. (It would be a while before the local band was quite in that league but we could offer to host).

The additional benefits of a ring of 12 bells

Certain characteristics make bells more attractive to bell ringers. As mentioned above heavier bells tend to be attractive, but also higher numbers of bells. Ringers are attracted to rings of 12, since the ringing offers far more challenging opportunities for the ringer, and generates a far more complex musical effect. There are currently no rings of 12 in North Wales and only 2 in the whole of Wales. A ring of 12 in Betws-y-coed would be a significant addition to bell ringing in Wales.

Basing this upon bells of the quality of the Cleator Moor would create a new ring of 12 of some distinction that would draw ringers from across the UK.

Installing a ring of 12 bells at St Mary's would be a really exciting and positive step forward for the Church, Betws-y-coed and the Ringing Community at large.

Options

Option	Benefits	Negatives	Quality of end result (0 poor – 5 excellent)	Costs	Recommended?
Status quo - with repair the clock / hour chime	Replacing the missing hour chime	No growth opportunity, no long-term benefits	2	£5,000 (Quotation from Derby clockmakers)	No
Install St John's Porthmadog redundant bells	Bells at St Mary's	Poor quality bells when in St John's became redundant. Replicated at Betws.	2 (manageable small bells)	£100k (Quotation from John Taylor and co)	No

Install St John's Porthmadog plus augmentation to 12	Bells at St Mary's that would attract visiting bands. New ring of 12 (currently only 2 in Wales). Rarity value, Betws attractive town - tourism	However, these would not be a ring of any distinction – a ring with a poor reputation.	2 (less manageable with small 4 added)	£113k Quotation from John Taylor and co plus estimate of augmentation)	No
Install Cleator Moor bells (8)	Beautiful-sounding bells, instantly attractive for bellringers	More expensive	5	£130k Quotation from John Taylor and co	Yes
Install Cleator Moor bells, plus augmentation to 12	Exceptional ring of bells once augmented to 12. Hugely attractive and beautiful sound.	More expensive	5+	£190k Quotation from John Taylor and co	Yes