

NUSCR's war with pigeons



*The bells covered in pigeon muck;
the reason you tell learners not to look up!*

In May 2019 NUSCR found themselves homeless as work began at their home tower of All Saints, Nottingham. The mission: Clean a decade of pigeon mess, build a brand-new floor above the bells, with trap doors for sound control, and renovate the ringing chamber.

As one would expect with a project such as this, the practical work couldn't simply begin without an awful lot of planning and work behind the scenes, so a big thanks go to everyone that has been involved in that side of the project. And a special thanks go to the ringers at St Peter's, Nottingham, for allowing us to use their tower while work went on.

There has been a massive amount of commitment from current students, alumni and friends. Without this commitment and drive, we would never have gotten this project off its feet – thanks guys!

The first stage of the project was, of course, to begin cleaning. A crack team spent the best part of fifty combined hours cleaning the middle chamber and belfry shovelling guano, which was over 1.5ft deep in some places, into bags. The total weight of all of the pigeon mess came to just over two tons. Once clean, and with the floor finally visible, the bell fixtures and fittings came off. In an ideal world we could keep anything deemed not to be in the way, but unfortunately the build-up of guano was so bad we were left with no choice but to remove everything so it could be cleaned properly.

Stage 2 of the works was to get scaffolding up. NUSCR's thanks go especially to Richard Wolfgang, a friend of the society who allowed us to use his lighting trussing, saving the project a substantial sum of money. Thanks also to Mike Semken, who provided Richard with technical drawings of the frame, allowing him to plan the structure. The scaffolding stage alone was approximately 80 hours of work! Following this was then a 55+ hours of lifting, cutting and laying planks on top of the new scaffolding to form a false floor, allowing us to safely dismantle the rotting ceiling. The planks from the false floor went on to be used as sound insulation under the bells.



*Left to right: Paul Mason, Fiona Kemm, Richard Wolfgang
and Alex Speakman*



Left to right: Fiona Kemm, Alex Speakman and Emily Hall

Following the construction of the false floor, it was finally time to begin removing the old ceiling. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it didn't require much force to come down. We suffered casualties in the form of one light (now repaired), when a small section of the ceiling collapsed under its own weight, but with that excitement aside, it was an undisputed success. In total, about ninety hours were spent removing the ceiling, cutting old beams and planks into manageable pieces and lowering them from the tower! During this time, the grating on the louvres was temporarily fixed; and on the eve of the 22nd October, I had the pleasure of officially declaring All Saints' pigeon-free.

With all the guano, planks and carpet out of the tower, we began drilling holes ready for steel. Four holes were drilled, and the rubble was bagged and removed from the tower. As such, we found ourselves taking a breather.

On the 22nd November work resumed. Steel and timber arrived on site. We spent two days lifting, sawing and joining to begin the creation of the new floor. We then decided we had earned the pub and I added the 130 hours of work to my ever-growing time recording spreadsheet!



*Left to right: Andy Wignell, Vic Halford, Andy Jackson
and Edward Walker*



Edward Walker and Alex Speakman testing out the new floor

Following a further 120 or so hours of combined volunteer hours laying the floor over the joists we finally had a floor, and the bells were, at last, sealed from the elements. Somewhat depressingly at the time, the next step was to cut holes in our shiny new floor for the creation of the trap doors which act as sound control. But with the new doors in place, we could take a break from the new floor, just for a while, and focus on getting the belfry smartened up and the ringing room refurbished.

After generous amounts of disinfectant and cleaner, the bells were all polished up with a graphite-based paste to hide the years of staining from the bird droppings and make them look shiny and like new. The headstocks were painted to finish the look. Next, the fixtures and fittings were sanded, coated and raised back into the tower before being fixed back onto the bells – and suddenly we found ourselves with a very smart looking belfry.

The ringing chamber received a full makeover. A brand-new carpet was laid, and new boxes for standing on and for storage were made from oak. NUSCR need lots of storage for their growing collection of hats for their much-loved giraffe mascot, Geraldine.

The project still isn't done though! Once we can safely do so, and have faculties in place, the tower will receive a couple of new windows, a brand new headstock for the ninth bell, and the ceiling in the ringing room will have a new skin over it to cover the years of bodging and patchwork. We also plan a technology upgrade, with new HD CCTV cameras to be installed in the belfry and above the new floor: not only will this be a very useful teaching aid, but it will also allow a quick check that the sound control is working as it should and there is nothing obviously wrong in the belfry without the need to go upstairs. A monitor in the ringing room will show images from the cameras, and simulator software.

Just before the annual dinner in February, NUSCR finally returned to All Saints, approximately ten months after they left. And while it is a shame that we only had a few weeks of ringing before the tower



The spire of All Saints

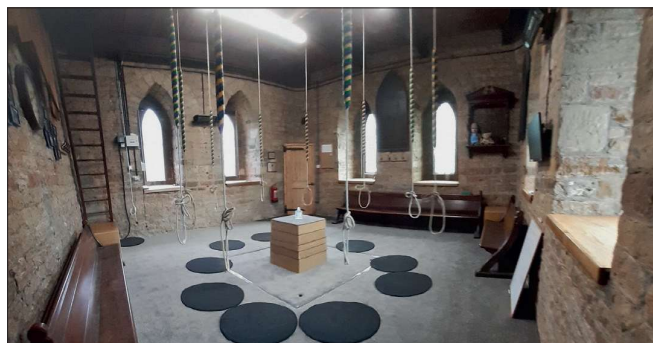
was closed due to COVID-19, we are very much looking forward to returning to the tower. With any luck, we'll even have some new freshers who can enjoy it with us!

If you're planning on coming to The University of Nottingham or Nottingham Trent University, don't hesitate to get in touch via master@nusc.org, and visit our website www.nusc.org. The society is very much alive despite the lockdown and we'd love to welcome you to the group!

EDWARD A S WALKER
Steeple Keeper, NUSCR



Cleaned up like new once more



The new refurbished ringing chamber

EXECUTIVE OF THE CENTRAL COUNCIL OF CHURCH BELL RINGERS

President: Simon Linford, Deputy President: David Kirkcaldy

Treasurer: Andrew Smith, Secretary: Mary Bone,

11 Bullfields, Sawbridgeworth, Herts, CM21 9DB

(01279 726159) secretary@cccb.org.uk

Phillip Barnes, Alison Everett, David Smith, Clyde Whittaker

Website address: www.cccb.org.uk