

Press release

President views UK casting of new bell for New Zealand Earthquake City

The Council's President, Kate Flavell, visited the World-famous bell foundry of John Taylor & Co in Loughborough on 13 December to watch the casting of a new number five bell for Christchurch Cathedral, New Zealand.

This bell has inscribed on it:

Recast in 2013 after falling with the tower with the earthquake of February 22nd 2011.

Standing tall and staying strong

Kia Kaha

(Kia Kaha is Maori for *Stay Strong* and was a phrase much used in support of the people of Christchurch and Canterbury after the quake and is used here to recognise that the bells survived despite such a destructive fall.)

When the tower of Christchurch Cathedral collapsed in the earthquake of February 2011 bell ringers everywhere felt the pain of the potential damage to the 13 bells and wanted to help. Once it became clear that no one in the tower had been killed or injured, thoughts turned to the fate of the bells, which had fallen from the top of the tower to the bottom.

In fact it transpired that the bells were largely intact, other than a serious crack to bell number five of the 13, where number 13 is the heaviest. The bells have now been repaired and refitted by Taylors, with the fifth re-cast and will soon be on their way back to Christchurch, courtesy of Maersk Shipping Line.

It will take a long time before the long-term future of the Cathedral is decided, but it will be a real symbol of hope for the future that the bells are ready for their new home. A new transitional cardboard cathedral has opened in Christchurch. This has no room for bells but the bellringers are investigating the possibility of a temporary tower to hold six of the smaller bells.

The Central Council has been able to facilitate a fund for charitable donations from UK bell ringers to help our Kiwi friends. This fund is still open for donations as more money will be needed for the temporary tower.

Kate Flavell, Council President, said: *I was delighted to be Taylors to witness the casting of the new bell and to be part of the excitement surrounding the new start for the bells of Christchurch Cathedral.*

Peter Whitehead, Tower Captain at Christchurch Cathedral, said: *We feel we have taken an important step towards bells ringing out again in Christchurch, but there are many more steps to take.*

***** Ends *****

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Next page for background information

Background information

About change ringing

Change ringing is a unique form of performance art that requires a special blend of physical and mental skills. It provides intellectual stimulation, modest physical activity and social contact. Change ringing on tower bells developed in England around the end of the sixteenth century. Worldwide there now are over 40,000 active ringers and around 6,000 towers with bells hung for change ringing. Most are in England, but there are several hundred towers with active bands of ringers across the rest of the British Isles, the Commonwealth and the USA. Bells hung for change ringing swing through 360 degrees when rung – mouth up to mouth up – and they strike once on each swing. Typical bells weigh between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ ton, but some are lighter and many weigh well over a ton. Each bell is controlled by one person on the end of the bell rope some way below the bells. The special way that the bells are hung means that only modest effort is needed to ring them in accurately timed sequences. In perfect ringing each blow is accurate to a few hundredths of a second.

About the Bells and Ringers at Christchurch Cathedral

The 13 new bells, replacing an earlier ring of ten Taylors bells, were cast at Taylors of Loughborough in 1978; were carried to New Zealand on the good ship “Flinders Bay” and unpacked in front of the Cathedral on 8th November 1978 and after urgent work, rung for the first time on Christmas Day, hanging on the massive steel frame which has replaced the worn-out old oaken one of 1881. Three of the new bells were in memory of Archbishop Julius, one given by the ringers, and bell number 11 recorded the magnificent work of Mr. James Collins who played the leading part in raising the half million dollars for the Cathedral Restoration Appeal.

The Christchurch Cathedral Ringers are just like most groups of ringers - a mixed bunch. They have a teenager and an eighty year old and lots in-between and they vary in skill from just learning to experienced ringers. Prior to the quake they practised on Tuesdays and usually had enough people to ring for morning and evening services on Sundays. As Christchurch is a major tourist destination they often welcomed visitors from overseas, usually at the beginning or end of their trip to New Zealand.

The Cathedral ringers would also ring for many civic occasions and were an integral part of New Year celebrations in the Square. One of their most unusual duties was to ring to welcome the return of the migratory bar-tailed godwits from Siberia each Spring.

One of their main aims is to keep the band together while they start the long process of bringing the bells back. They know this is going to be a difficult job, but they have lots of ideas for social events and opportunities for ringing elsewhere.

About the ringing community

Bell ringers form a close-knit extended community that shares a common skill and heritage. This is reflected in the universal welcome and opportunity to ring with them that ringers around the world offer to any visiting ringer. Most ringers belong to the band at the tower(s) where they regularly ring for church services. They also belong to the ringing society covering their area or country, each of which has from a few dozen to a couple of thousand members. The societies are affiliated to the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers, which represents ringers worldwide, and provides many services to the ringing community.

Further information

Central Council of Church Bell Ringers: www.cccbr.org.uk

About Christchurch bells and ringers: anzab.org.au/ChristchurchRingers

About change ringing: cccbr.org.uk/changeringing

Ringing towers worldwide dove.cccbr.org.uk

Discover Bellringing: bellringing.org