

NUSCR's War with Pigeons

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 bit 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, 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!

To give an overview of the story so far: the first stage of the project was of course, to begin cleaning. A crack team spent the best part of 50 combined hours cleaning the middle chamber and belfry, shovelling guano into bags, which was over 1.5ft deep in some places. The total weight of all of the pigeon mess came to just over 2 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.



Photo by Ed Walker



Photo by Ed Walker

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 90 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, the rubble has been bagged and removed from the tower. As such, we found ourselves taking a breather!



Photo by Emily Hall

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On the 22nd November work resumed. Steel and timber arrived on site. We spent 2 days lifting, sawing and joining to begin the creation of the new floor. After which we decided we earned the pub and I added 130 hours of work to my ever-growing time recording spreadsheet!

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.



Photo by Adam Wilmott

Somewhat depressingly at the time, the next step was to cut holes in our shiny new floor, this was 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 getting the ringing room refurbished.



Photo by Adam Wilmott

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 like shiny and 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 make over. A brand-new carpet was installed, followed with new window ledges, boxes to stand on, and a couple of handmade storage boxes. All made hand made from an Oak Veneered ply. NUSCR need lots of storage for their growing collection of hats for their much-loved giraffe mascot, Geraldine

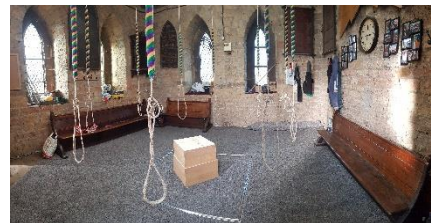


Photo by Paul Mason



Photo by Ed Walker

On top of this, we had a technology upgrade, with new HD CCTV cameras 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 shows the cameras and in future will display the simulator software.

The project still isn't done though! Once we can safely do so, and have faculty's in place, the tower will receive a couple of new windows, a brand new headstock for the 9th bell and the ceiling in the ringing room will have a new skin over it to cover the years of bodging and patchwork.

Just before the annual dinner in February, NUSCR finally returned to All Saints, approximately 10 months after they left. And while it is a shame that we only had a few weeks of ringing before the tower 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@nuscr.org, and visit our website www.nuscr.org. The society is very much alive despite the lockdown and we'd love to welcome you to the group!

Edward Walker
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