**A history of the Staindrop bells by Bernard and Betty Poole**

We know that three bells were present in church in 1552 as mentioned in the King’s Commissioners’ report. But English style change ringing as we now know it, came to Staindrop St Mary’s in 1685, when five new bells were cast by Samuel Smith I of York, with the heaviest bell weighing just over 13cwt. These bells served the parish well and a number of national events were marked with their ringing as reported in the church accounts from the 18th Century.

In 1787 the parish was presented with a ring of six bells by Mrs Raby Vane, cast by the bell founder William & Thomas Mears of Whitechapel, again with the heaviest bell weighing just over 13cwt. For over sixty years after Mrs Vane died the bells were rung muffled on the anniversary of her death.

Only one peal was ever rung on these six bells in February 1905, conducted by Mr Daniel Shipp. Daniel Shipp came to Staindrop in 1863, were upon he formed a band of change ringers, Daniel served for many years as Tower Captain before passing on this role to his son Mr Harry Shipp. Sadly, after doing service for over a hundred and forty years the bells were no longer considered safe to ring and needed recasting. So, in October 1924 a project to recast these six bells and add two new bells to provide a ring of eight bells was initiated by the vicar Rev H S C Spurrier at a cost of £1,000.

The new bells were cast by the bell founder John Taylors & Co. of Loughborough with the heaviest bell weighing just over 15cwt. The old oak frame and beams were also replaced with steel girders and a new cast iron bell frame. On Palm Sunday 1925 the eight bells rang out for the first time when the Bishop of Durham conducted the dedication service. The following Easter Monday, 13th April the vicar put out an invite to all ringers wishing to try out the new bells with dinner provided at the King’s Arms.

Few records have been found for the period after the new bells were installed though a photo from the early/mid 1960s shows a young band of bell ringers being taught by Peter Jackson. The bells were overhauled and rehung in 1979 by Col. Dale Trotter and Mrs Aidie Fife in memory of their mother Mrs Katie Trotter. Then in 1999 Betty Poole brought together a band of ringer to ring for the Millenium. Sadly, regular ringing stopped shortly after this, until March 2024 with the help of the Teasdale Bell Ringers regular Sunday service ringing began once more.