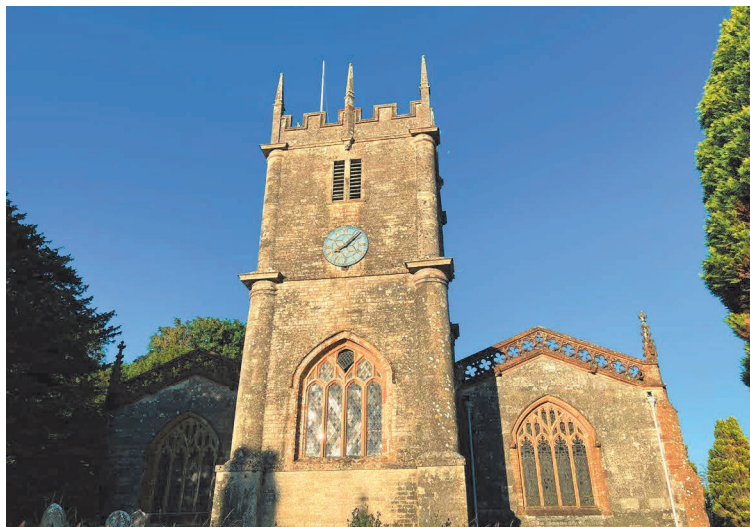


# Going for Gold at St Mary's, Frampton

Gareth Downs, Dorset

I learnt how to handle a bell as a teenager at St James' Church in Poole, Dorset. My head of music was the tower captain, and led the band at St. James' and also at St. Mary's on Brownsea Island. As a teenager I picked up the basics quickly, but as young adult life began, I lost the time to continue as a ringer.

I have always had a love of our Church buildings, their history, and the architecture of both parish churches and grand cathedrals. After moving to the village of Frampton in 2019, an attraction to the location was that our house is sited just behind the parish Church, and we could hear the tenor bell struck by the clock hammer on the hour – although there was no regular ringing or local band in the tower,



*St Mary's Frampton*

In the summer of 2022 I went on a recruitment drive to train a local band to try and get the bells moving once more. With several taking up the opportunity, we arranged for a tower inspection, only to discover the bells were in need of major work – some 100 years after the last rehang of the bells there. The teaching continued at the village of Maiden Newton, and I set about researching the history of the tower and the most sympathetic way to recommission the bells whilst preserving the history, as part of the *50 Ringing Things* challenge to which I had recently signed up.

I have found the *50 Things* a brilliant way to reconnect to ringing, and many of them have helped me improve my skill as a ringer, and get me out to different towers to see how they have managed similar projects when major work is needed on listed bells and frames. The new friends I have made on ringing outings, completing quarter peals and ringing for special events like Christmas and New Year have given me a new network of contacts. Their experiences and knowledge have helped me with the project planning at Frampton, which I hope will eventually result in the bells ringing again.



*The tenor, fifth and fourth bells up at Frampton*

The tower originally held six full circle ring bells and a Sanctus bell, gifted to the church by the land owner of the village, Robert Browne. The bells were cast by Lewis Cockey from Frome in 1694. Over the years the treble, 4th, 5th and 6th have been recast, so we have a mismatched ring, but the lovely 1920 Taylors 16 cwt tenor masks a lot of the individual flaws. The bells are hung in a mighty oak frame, dating back to 1694, which has been modified over the years, but is now listed. With only eleven Cockey bells left in churches, three in Frampton, I feel it is important to preserve them and the frame for future generations.

I hope to achieve my *50 Things* Gold by the end of this year. It has been a great way to push myself and develop in a fun way, using my love of history to reignite my interests from several decades ago.