

16 climatic changes which will worsen the situation. Although this explains what happens to the rain that falls in East Kent it will not solve our park problems.

Also, this October, I joined Environment Agency officials from Cambridge who were preparing a scheme to maintain the water level in all the lakes. We can only hope that our grandchildren will be able to enjoy these attractive features that we once took for granted.

*Stop Press: Early November. Joe reports that the lake in Russell Gardens is full again.*



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# *Dover Bells 2000*

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**Peter Dale**

**Hon Appeal Secretary - Bell Restoration Fund**

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In 1725 Samuel Knight, bell founder of Holborn, installed a ring of eight bells in the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Dover. It was typical of the time that the clappers were suspended from iron staples cast into the crowns of the bells. The oak frame would have stood upon the mediaeval timbers, which experts suggest may have supported an early spire, before the tower was built up to its present height.

Even if that was the case, it is not a stable platform for a heavy peal of bells. Records indicate that there was an active band of ringers in Dover during the eighteenth century but the constant pounding of the moving frame upon the tower walls for so long had its inevitable effect. The bells were silent for much of the last century and by 1898 the oak frame was deemed to be in such a poor condition that it had to be scrapped.

In that year, possibly as a project to welcome the twentieth century, major restoration work was carried out. Victorian concerns were for the safety of the tower and the spiral staircase was filled completely with concrete to stabilise the structure, alternative access being provided via a series of new step ladders. Window arches for the old stairs can still be seen clearly in the masonry of the South West corner of the tower.

The oak frame was replaced by massive cast iron sections, John Warner of London being the firm entrusted with this work. At the same time they "turned" the bells to allow the clappers to strike in new unworn places. Alas the lightest bell, the treble, was found to be cracked and a new one was cast from the old metal. Although the clappers of the seven surviving bells had to be modified, the original iron staples were left in place.

The shortcomings of the 1898 restoration became increasingly apparent over the next fifty years and in 1947 the bells were re-hung on ball bearings. The improvement was only marginal, however, because the whole installation still stands upon the unsteady ancient timbers. "Dover Bells 2000" is our project to welcome the new millennium. Rather than allow St Mary's tower fall silent once more, a complete restoration and modernisation is planned.

The bells will be removed to a foundry to be tuned and to have the old iron staples drilled out. Completely new fittings will be provided and a new frame built. While the tower is empty steel foundation girders will be built into the walls to lift the installation clear of the rickety historic timbers. All this will cost some £60,000 with an additional £40,000 for the associated building and other works.