



## **St Margaret's Church, Ipswich wins National Lottery funding to restore its historic bells and re-open its doors to visitors.**

St Margaret's Church, next to Christchurch Park in Ipswich, has received a grant of £163,600 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) towards a project to reopen its doors to visitors, to provide a much improved heritage visitor experience, to restore and re-hang its 400-year old bells and to create an enhanced facility for attracting and teaching new bell ringers of all ages. The work is due to start in early 2017 and finish in 2018. Generous donations to cover the full £272,000 cost of the project have also been received from the Suffolk Guild of Ringers, private individuals and members of the Church.

St Margaret's is well known as the finest medieval church in Ipswich still in regular use. Unfortunately, due to thefts, vandalism and anti-social behaviour, it has been closed to visitors except for services since 2011. The HLF funding will allow the church to be open during the week for prayer and quiet reflection and for visits from everyone wishing to explore its heritage. This will be achieved by installing CCTV, to be monitored 24/7, thus ensuring the safety of the building, its contents and visitors to the church.

The visitor experience will be enhanced by new lighting for the unique carved and painted nave roof, with new display areas, booklets and guides. In addition, a new church website will enable all-comers to discover and learn about the current activities and fascinating heritage of this 700-year-old church in the heart of Ipswich. Volunteers from the church and wider community will be involved in all areas of the project, including working with St Margaret's Primary School to produce a children's guide to the church and recording a selection of oral histories to bring alive the history and heritage of St Margaret's to a much wider range of people.

When the bells were last rehung in 1899, various problems were introduced. These will be remedied by re-hanging the bells and creating a ringing gallery lower in the tower so that the ringers will be visible from inside the church. With newly hung bells and a visible gallery St Margaret's will actively seek new bell ringers especially from local schools and youth groups. A structured teaching programme will be offered by trained ringers, assisted by a computer bell simulator and a video screen linked to cameras around the bells, all funded by the HLF grant.

Whilst the bells are removed, the historic tower clock made in Ipswich by Moore in 1778 will be refurbished and an electronic winder and regulator installed. This will ensure that the clock keeps perfect time and doesn't need hand-winding weekly as currently required.

## Quotes

Commenting on the award Canon David Cutts, Vicar of St Margaret's said: "Bell ringing is a very significant part of the life of the church, calling people to worship each Sunday and celebrating special events such as marriages. We are very grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund for their generous support in giving us the opportunity to renovate the bells. This project will also enable the church to be open more often for people from the community to come and pray and for visitors to appreciate the fine historical building."

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of HLF East of England, said: "The bells at St Margaret's have been ringing for more than 450 years and now, thanks to National Lottery players, their future as part of Ipswich's heritage is bright. We're delighted to support this project which will enable not only the sound of the bells to be heard for generations to come but also their story and that of their historic home, which will be open once again as a place for people and communities."

## The Historical Significance of St Margaret's

St Margaret's Church is a Grade 1 listed building - one of very few such buildings in Ipswich. It was first built around 1300 and enlarged and much embellished by wealthy parishioners in the succeeding centuries. The tower was added around 1400. The first record of tower bells was 1553, although they may have been there earlier. What is known is that they were replaced by six new bells in 1630, five of which remain in use today in the total ring of eight bells. During the late C15 the nave walls were raised and supported by an elaborately carved, wooden double hammer-beam roof. The decorative carvings of saints and angels were badly damaged by the Puritans on the orders of Oliver Cromwell after the Civil War, but in 1695 the roof panels were painted in exuberant style to celebrate the accession of William and Mary, with the shields of the leading local families added for good measure. The roof is unique and is the chief glory of the church; it was restored in 1996 but is not easy to see from the ground. Part of the project will be to install new roof lighting and provide a table with a mirror on so its fine details can be seen much more clearly.

## About the Heritage Lottery Fund

Thanks to National Lottery players, we invest money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife. [www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk)  
[@heritagelottery](https://twitter.com/heritagelottery)

## Further information

For further information, images and interviews please contact

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