

NORTH YORKSHIRE

St James the Great, Baldersby St James

The Church of St James was designed by the eminent Victorian Architect, William Butterfield, built by Mr R H Norris of London, and funded by William Henry Dawnay, 7th Viscount Downe. It was consecrated in 1857 and is Grade 1 Listed.

Mounted on a cast iron frame some eighty feet above the ground, the slender tower contains a ring of eight bells. Within the porch there is a door which, when opened, reveals a spiral stone stairway which leads to the ringing chamber and the bells themselves.

According to the Ripon and Richmond Chronicle dated 3 October 1857 reporting on the consecration and opening of the Church “there swung therein (the tower) eight glorious bells whose melodious tones would forever and a day assent and maintain the skill of one Master Taylor of Loughborough the founder thereof”

Unfortunately the mismatch of the slender tower, with an internal measurement of eleven feet by twelve feet, overloaded with bells weighing some six tons and too heavy for the tower, meant that the bells have been rarely rung as intended – that is full circle. On more than

one occasion those ringers that tried are reported to have fled the tower in terror on account of its movement and the noise generated by the bell clappers striking the surrounding masonry.



Eventually discretion became the better part of valour and the church authorities at the time decided, in the late 1870's, to dispense with the eight bell ringers and their ropes and install an Ellacombe Chiming System. The system, put in place by Mr J R Jerram of Spalding, Lincolnshire, was very basic and lacked a ratchet and pawl system to adjust the ropes making the bells difficult to play.

Mr Butterfield was made fully aware of the potential overload and the possible consequences before the tower and spire were constructed but chose to ignore Mr Taylors concerns. Perhaps he was mindful of the instructions given by his patron, the Viscount Downe, who, when he placed the order with John Taylor, said “Let them be a good peal and don't spare the metal!”