

## DRINKSTONE BELLS: Project Update, 21<sup>st</sup> February 2025.

The long-awaited Bat Licence was finally approved by Natural England in the middle of November 2024, allowing work to restart on our bells project in January. This phase lasted 3 weeks, starting with the installation of a fine new belfry floor, followed by building and fitting of the sound controls. Next was removing of the old floor and support beams which threw up a new "challenge". We discovered that when the beams were installed during the building of the tower in ~1690, four beams had also been embedded, one in each wall, and locked together at the corners. That wouldn't normally be an issue, except that 2/3rds of them were completely rotted away to dust, effectively leaving a large void in those walls! So that was extra building work needed, on top of capping and filling an old (Victorian?) chimney in the south wall. In the next few days we mixed, lifted and laid around 1.4 tons of concrete to make the tower ready. A similar amount of rubble was cut out of the walls to make pockets to fit the new steel support beams (for the bell frame) when they arrive. Our local residents, and Suffolk Guild of Ringers volunteers, provided excellent support in sometimes very cold conditions. They were very grateful for the food and hot beverages provided by a team of local ladies.

So we successfully reached the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the project and can definitely say that the tower structure is in a far stronger condition than it was previously: the decision to install a new frame supported by new steel beams has been totally ratified.

We now await the 3<sup>rd</sup>, and main, installation phase. Work is scheduled to begin on Feb 24<sup>th</sup> and take about 2 to 3 weeks. If all goes to plan then we should hear our new peal of 6 bells ringing out by mid-March!



Drinkstone's new bells at the foundry