

The Heckington Chimes

2004-2007

Galvanised mild steel, mechanical workings and computer, bells
210x210x220cms

Heckington is a large village near Sleaford in Lincolnshire. It has a magnificent church and an impressive working eight-sailed windmill. Once I was selected to undertake the commission I fairly quickly came up with the idea of building an automata clock for the green. The Parish Council approved this in principle and in detail at a meeting in July 2004. I pressed ahead with a design, which was ready to go for planning permission by the end of July 2004.

The form of fairground booths influenced the design (Heckington has a famous annual fair) as well as details of the church and windmill design. I was also concerned to accommodate six teenagers jumping up and down on top of it. The inside was really a case of form following function. It seemed easiest to me if the figures would rise up out of the base and then when fully extended strike the bells. The bells needed to be attached to something and a tree seemed a suitable form. For the original design I chose to represent figures that were significant to Lincolnshire as a whole and related to exploration or navigation such as Joseph Banks and Sir John Franklin, navigation being intimately linked to the measurement of time. The Parish Council however wanted to represent people significant to Heckington history.

I then started to work on the spec for the production of the clock, which finally received planning permission on 29th March 2005. The procurement of the parts and building test rigs took a further six months so it was not until September that we began construction in earnest. Andy Blore had started working with me in the middle of 2005 and it was he that built most of the structure to my design. I built the figures and tree – the 'artistic bit'. Making the figures run smoothly was a complete nightmare and set us back several months. It wasn't until in desperation that we removed the track we were using and just had the figures loosely guided that we began to get somewhere. We had to build a crane so we could fit the roof, which was too heavy to lift.

By January 2006 we were nearing completion. Tom Hulbert and Durrell Bishop had written the programming, and Bryson Gore had begun to work on the electrical engineering. The chimes were finished during March 2006. Nick Jones came and approved the finished article prior to galvanising. The Heckington Parish Council would not accept installation on the prepared site until they had approved the finished object. Nick Jones then arranged to have the chimes installed in the shop of the Hub in Sleaford. At this point the Heckington Parish Council saw the finished article for the first time and rejected it out of hand. Nick then persuaded them to allow the chimes to be installed if the figures were painted. Over the course of the summer and autumn 2006 I painted the figures. It was then installed in the quadrangle of the North Kesteven District Council offices in May 2007 where it remained for some weeks and where the Heckington Parish Council again rejected it. It then went to Aurbourn Hall near Lincoln for a few days then back into storage where it currently remains.

There doesn't seem much point in railing at the causes of this situation. I am extremely happy with and proud of the finished result. I just hope that at some point the chimes will find a permanent home. In the meantime I hope mice don't eat the cables.