Central Council of Church Bell Ringers

"Registered Charity number 270036"

Public Relations Committee

Bells In Your Care

Some notes for incumbents and churchwardens who find themselves responsible for a peal of church bells

August 2015

BELL RINGING

The sound of church bells ringing out can provide very loud evidence of the existence of an active church with an active congregation and you are fortunate to have bells in your care. Ringers and the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers can help with anything you need to know. This is a brief summary.

The very English art of full circle ringing has been practised in this country for over 400 years, and more recently in other countries around the world. The skill, which takes several months to acquire, lies in controlling the bell as it swings full circle so that it can be made to sound at a precise point - like, indeed, any other musical instrument. Younger people generally learn more quickly, but most people of almost any age can learn to ring.

Because ringing is by definition a group activity (one ringer for each bell being rung), each tower with a ring of bells usually has a local band, led by its chosen tower captain, and usually belonging to the local bellringers' guild or association. These in turn are affiliated to the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers (CCCBR), which through its committees seeks to provide help and information about all bell matters, including maintenance of towers and belfries, fundraising, redundant bells, publications, public relations and much more

The Central Council website (cccbr.org.uk/towerstewardship) has some very useful advice about tower management, health and safety and fire risk assessment for bell towers, among much more information. Look for Stewardship Leaflets. Alternatively, contact your local ringing society, or DAC bells adviser.

THE MECHANICS

A "Ring" of bells is a set of three or more bells, hung for full circle ringing with rope and wheel. A "Chime" is any number, hung to be sounded more gently by hammers, or by swinging through a small arc.

Take an early opportunity to visit your tower in the company of your tower captain. For health and safety reasons, NEVER, ever, go alone: church towers are fascinating but lonely places, and a fall might mean lying undiscovered for hours. Moreover, if the bells have been left ready to ring in the mouth upward position, (ie UP), touching them or the ropes could be very dangerous, as the tower captain will explain.

Bell installations vary; but you will find that your bells are hung in a frame with a wheel and other fittings similar to those shown in this diagram. If the bells don't have complete wheels, your church has a "chime" rather than a "ring" of bells.

If, at present, you do not have any ringers at your tower, for help and support, contact your local ringing guild or association. Alternatively, you local DAC will have a bells adviser who can either advise you directly, or put you in touch with the local society.

FREQENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who can I ask about the state of the bells and fittings in our tower?

Your tower captain can advise on sources of information; or contact the local bell ringing society or DAC bells adviser. Full contact details can be found on the Central Council Website.

Why is it necessary to practise every week?

Like any musical activity, progress only comes with regular practice.

How long does it take to train a ringer?

Learning to control a bell accurately requires skill. Different people learn at different rates, but 10-15 hours of individual tuition followed by many hours learning to ring with other ringers is not uncommon. This can take many months..

Why don't ringers always stay to the service?

Any number of reasons! Other services to ring for, attending another service - or even not being a Christian. If the latter, it may be helpful to know that ringing has been a gentle door into church life for many. You may find it of benefit to visit the ringers in the ringing chamber on a Sunday morning, to pray with them. This will help foster links between the ringers and the church.

Should I let visiting ringers ring our bells?

If you possibly can, yes: your tower captain or tower secretary will normally make the necessary arrangements. There is a tradition of welcome among ringers; and visiting other towers and ringing on different bells is an excellent way to gain experience and make progress. Your ringers too may find visiting other towers enjoyable and helpful.

The more your bells are rung, the more it will remind those outside of the church's prescence.

Should ringers charge for ringing for weddings?

It is normal practice for a fee to be charged for wedding ringing. This should be discussed and agreed with the bell ringers in advance, and a policy be set. The fee is usually paid by the wedding couple, often directly to the ringers. Ringers are volunteers and are not generally employees of the church. For advice, have a look at Steve Coleman's articles on the Ringing World website (www.ringingworld.co.uk), "Ringing and Money".

Who should appoint the tower captain?

Ringers soon learn who among their number is competent to lead them. An accepted leader, democratically elected by the band, with the election ratified by the incumbent, is the ideal. Have a look at the Central Council's Stewardship leaflet on Tower Management.

How do I deal with complaints about noise?

Reasonably and openly in the first instance. The Central Council offers advice how to deal with complaints. They also offer a Complaints Helpline, who can offer additional advice. Have a look at the Central Council's Stewardship leaflet on Noise, the Law and the Environmental Health Officer. Contact details for the complaints help line can be found under Key Links on the Councils website.

What about Safety?

Heavy masses of moving metal must not be treated unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly. In a nutshell, it's important that access to the bells is restricted only to those who know what they're doing: the tower should never be left unlocked; bells and bellropes should only be touched by experienced ringers or by learners with an instructor; builders or workmen should always be accompanied; and people should not be in the tower alone.

The Central Council website has some very useful advice about tower management, health and safety and fire risk assessment for bell towers. Look for Stewardship Leaflets. Alternatively, contact your local ringing society, or DAC bells adviser.

What about Safegaurding?

There are some helpful guidelines on this on the Central Council website but as a general rule the official diocesan guidance will cover most bell ringing situations. These questions cannot, of course, be answered fully in a leaflet such as this. Your local ringing association will be able to give you more comprehensive answers to them; and can help, too, with any difficulties.

SOURCES OF HELP

The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers *(Registered Charity number 270036)*

Many pages of the Central Council's website (ccccbr.org.uk) give information about all aspects of ringing (some of it's a bit technical, but do persist). Alternatively you could contact the Council's Honorary Secretary by email at secretary@cccbr.org.uk

Your local ringing association, guild or society

Contact information for all local ringing societies and associations can be found on the Central Council's website. Your Diocesan webpage will normally have links to the local ringing societies. Local associations usually have:

- a Bell Adviser,
- an Education Officer or
- a Public Relations Officer

who will be able to offer advice or help.

cccbr.org.uk

secretary@cccbr.org.uk

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