



Central Council of Church Bell Ringers

"Registered Charity number 270036"

Tower Stewardship Committee

Insurance Implications of Leaving Bells "Up"

These Guidance Notes were originally compiled in 1994 by the [Ecclesiastical Insurance Group](#) (EIG) following negotiations with a sub-group of the Central Council Administrative Committee, comprising Messrs A. W. R. Wilby (Chairman), R. J. Cooles, A. J. Frost and I. H. Oram, and Mrs K. Flavell.

The Notes are intended to provide guidance to bellringers and to field staff of EIG in negotiating safe practices where local circumstances require bells to be left in the "up" position during the working week. The notes indicate a general safe case which should be interpreted to meet each unique local situation.

Introduction

The EIG assessed the risk at the time as follows:

- "Ringers do not have absolute control of the access to bell towers. Control rests in part with the Incumbents and Church Wardens, but others have the right of access at all times. They include Officers of the Insurers, Architects, Fire Officers, etc. It is not therefore possible for ringers to claim that no-one can go up the tower without their permission. In consequence, bells left in the "up" position represent a danger to any unknowledgeable person legitimately entering the tower and not under the supervision of the ringers.
- "A number of accidents or near misses happen each year. The consequences of such an accident can be catastrophic, resulting in death or very serious injury. The incidence of such events, whilst infrequent, is such as not to be rare.
- "With the increasing tendency of people to go to litigation and the implications of the Health and Safety at Work Act, EIG do not consider the risk to be one which they wish to take commercially. Without such cover the Church Officers are therefore exposed to this liability which they would be irresponsible to take."

The EIG has periodically reviewed its guidance which (as at June 2015) is presented below:

General

Bells should be left in the 'down' position when not in use during the working week between 7am Monday and 6pm Friday with Public Holidays excepted.

Outside this period, if bells are left in the 'up' position then the ropes must be hoisted towards the ceiling on a 'spider' and locked in position. Notices warning that the bells are 'up' and that the ropes must not be touched should be displayed in the ringing chamber. The access door to the bell chamber must be kept locked, a danger notice exhibited and a single key kept in the control of the Ringing Master or deputy.

If access is required to the bell chamber during the weekend, whilst the bells are 'up', then this must be under the control of the Ringing Master or deputy.

Special conditions concerning heavy rings of bells

Rings of bells where the tenor weighs 20cwt or more may additionally be left in the 'up' position during the working week, providing that the following conditions are met.

The bell-frame must be secured against any person being able to come into contact with the bells without the authority of the Ringing Master. This may be done by caging in the bell-frame, fencing any walkway or securing any door adjacent to the bell-frame with materials sufficiently robust to prevent access.

A single controlled door in the cage or screen shall be provided with a single key, which shall remain in the control of the Ringing Master or deputy whilst the bells are up. Where no access route to another part of the building passes through the bell chamber, the access door to the bell chamber itself may be considered the controlled door.

Turning the clappers of bells up 'wrong'

Where it is necessary to turn the clapper of a bell to the 'right' side after ringing bells 'up' then the following must be observed:

- (a) the procedure for turning the clapper must be specified in detail and approved by Ecclesiastical. A copy shall be displayed prominently in the ringing chamber
- (b) only the Ringing Master or other trained deputy shall be allowed to carry out the procedure.

Bell maintenance

All maintenance should be undertaken with the bells 'down' either by, or under the direction of the Steeple Keeper. A second person should be present with the Steeple Keeper during maintenance operations to assist and take action in the event of an emergency. Lone working should be avoided. However, where this is not possible, a Steeple Keeper working alone amongst the bells must take steps to advise another responsible person of their proposed activity and timescale. They must undertake to advise the responsible person at a prescribed time of the completion of the task. Failing receipt of such advice, the responsible person must take immediate steps to ascertain the safety of the Steeple Keeper. Unauthorised access to the ringing chamber must be prohibited whilst work is being undertaken on the bells and/or bell frame.

Definitions

1. ***Ringing Master***
Otherwise *Tower Captain* or *Conductor*, being the person with delegated powers from the incumbent, PCC or alternative authority, with responsibility for the ringing of the bells and safety within the tower.
2. ***Steeple Keeper***
The person with delegated responsibility for the general maintenance of the bells.
3. ***Spider***
Rope and pulley system with hook upon which the ropes can be hung and drawn up towards the ceiling.
4. ***Ringing Room***
Room or area from which the bells are rung.
5. ***Bell Chamber***
The area of the tower in which the bell frame is located.
6. ***'Up' position***
The bell mouth upwards and the bell at rest supported by the stay and slider mechanism in readiness for 'full circle' ringing.
7. ***'Down' position***
The bell mouth downwards and at rest.
8. ***'Wrong' position***
Having rung the bell 'up' the clapper is resting against the higher side of the bell mouth (the 'wrong' side) and before ringing can commence the clapper has to be moved over to the lower side.