

So, you've agreed to run a Group Visit or Tower Open Day



1. What Next ?

You may have decided in a rash moment to open your tower to a group visit or to the public, perhaps to support an event such as [Heritage Open Days](#) or to achieve a recruitment goal. If you have and you're now wondering how best to go to about it, this article is for you. It's focus is on towers in England and Wales, but many of its suggestions are equally applicable to other countries and regions. It brings together practical tips which have worked at many successful tower events, **but please don't feel you have to do everything** – just pick out the ideas that are useful to you.



2. Why run a Group Visit or Open Day ?

Unless you're lucky enough to have a ground floor ring, the world which you and your band inhabit will seem remote and somewhat secretive to the average member of the public. Visits and Open Days are a superb opportunity to pull aside the curtain which hides you and your band and so generate interest, engagement and often new ringers from your community.



3. Know Your Aims

As with any event, the more you put in the more you will get out ! You'll probably have one of both of two aims :-

- to raise awareness of bell ringing, and/or
- to gain new recruits.

If you're *just* looking to raise awareness of bell ringing, your objectives will be more limited, but if you're looking to gain new recruits, running a hands-on 'taster session' will work very well. Whatever the aim, make sure everyone helping knows beforehand what you are trying to achieve.



4. Advertising and Publicity

If you're running an Open Day you'll need to think about advertising. Here are some ideas:

An article for the parish magazine, church notices, or local paper :-

- Feature the appealing things: 'have a go on the bells', visit the belfry, see how ringing is done, tea and cake
- Include a contact number or email. Someone may say they cannot come on that day but would love to come another time.
- If you don't have the time or resources to produce your own, the Central Council have a [useful template](#).

Posters

- Put your posters in church, outside church (laminated or in plastic folder), local library, doctor's surgery, bus stop shelter, local newsagent

An A5 flyer

- Put through doors of local neighbours. Leave a pile at the back of the church.

Your congregation

- Get the incumbent to talk about your event when giving notices during a service.
- Encourage the congregation to suggest anyone who would be interested in coming along (eg grandchildren)

An Outside PVC Banner

- You could consider getting a "Try your hand at bell ringing" banner made. They can be ordered online from various sources for around £40.

'What's On' Guides

- Start planning well ahead and ensure that you get your event included in all relevant lists of forthcoming events in your area. Most local newspapers have a 14 day cut-off for future event listings.

Working with larger events

- If your event is part of a larger local or national event, you should be able to tap into their audience. Make sure that your open tower is included in their publicity. Think how your event will fit into their overall schedule and the other attractions which will be on hand.
- National events such as [Heritage Open Days](#) (which takes place in September each year) generate lot of publicity, with many historic buildings open to the public. If your church is taking part then opening the tower as well will benefit both. Find out whether other buildings nearby intend to open and if so, explore

any opportunities to share publicity. Make contact with these venues and make sure they direct their visitors to you and vice versa.

Enrolment and Ticketing

- If you're concerned that you'll be inundated with people you could consider asking visitors to book in advance. At its simplest, you could set-up a 'one-off' email address and ask people to email to book a slot.
- However, this also can dissuade people, particularly if they are looking for somewhere to go on the day itself.
- You would be surprised how many people you can in fact accommodate – 80 or so is perfectly possible. The trick is to monitor groups going up to the belfry and have a range of things to interest them downstairs (see *Other Things To See And Do* below).



5. Essential Preparation

Your Event Plan

- You (on behalf of the church that owns the tower) have a duty of care to your visitors, so before inviting them you need a clear plan for the event, so you know who will be where and when.
- Consider whether your visitors will be taken around in single groups, one group at a time, or whether you will have multiple groups operating at the same time. The latter approach requires very good co-ordination to ensure that no groups meet on the stairs or in restricted passages. It also needs more stewards, but means you can accommodate many more people.
- Whichever way you choose, think how it will work if something doesn't go to plan, for example if one of the visitors wants to leave before the end.

Event Risk Assessment

- When you welcome people into the tower who are unfamiliar with the tower environment, you introduce risks that you as a ringer might not think of. You are responsible for ensuring your visitors' safety, so you should think about possible risks
- You will need to conduct a Risk Assessment in advance of the event to ensure your insurance cover is maintained (see *Permissions and Insurance* below).
- At first this seems a daunting task, but it needn't be onerous. It is just a means of thinking clearly about what might go wrong, and how to mitigate any risks. Most potential hazards are easy to manage if you think about them beforehand and put in place appropriate safeguards. Safeguards might be permanent things like replacing light bulbs or installing a new handrail, they might be temporary measures like roping off unsafe areas, putting up warning signs or

moving things that could get in the way, they might be procedural things like briefing visitors before they enter, or they might be about having enough stewards in the right places. There might be some things you decide can't be made safe enough, in which case you won't want to include them.

- There's no standard format for a risk assessment. At its simplest, it just involves doing a 'walk-through' of the path your visitors will take, noting any hazards (low ceiling height, steps etc.) and deciding on anything you need to do to mitigate each risk. It's up to your judgement how much you include, but you can find examples :-
 - on the [Tower Stewardship](#) section of the Central Council's website
 - on the [HSE's](#) website
- Consider all the routes that visitors may take, including, for example to leave the building in the event of an emergency.
- Bear in mind that non-ringers will be unfamiliar with many of the things that you take for granted, like spiral staircases, low doorways, bellropes, dusty walls or dim lighting. Visitors will also vary in size, agility and fitness.
- Make sure you point out potential hazards to your visitors during your safety briefing (see *Safety Talk* below)
- There are useful summaries of the Risk Assessment process on the [Central Council's](#) website and from [Ecclesiatical Insurance](#).

Stewards

- Give some thought to the number of stewards you will need and their placement. Have someone extra who is able to respond to anything unforeseen.

Fire Assessment Limits

- Establish how many visitors the tower and ringing room can accommodate at any one time for fire purposes and stick to them.

Safety Notices

- Fix a laminated notice at the base of the tower advising on the number of steps to the ringing chamber and belfry (if your visitors are going there), plus any access issues (for example uneven steps)
- Fix laminated notices ahead of any specific trip or collision hazards.

Unauthorised Access

- Visitors have a habit of probing areas where they are not supposed to be. Areas which are not supervised need to be locked up or if this is not possible cordoned off areas or protected by 'No Entry' signs.

Maximum Group Size and Minimum Age

- Work out your maximum group size ahead of the event and stick to it.
- Work out the minimum age at which you can safely allow children to visit the belfry and/or take part in a practical session.
- Make clear in your publicity what these limits are.

Emergencies

- Consider if someone did have an accident, is everything in place to enable you to respond.
- Check the tower first aid kit and have an emergency torch to hand..
- Make sure you have a notice with the tower's address and postcode prominently displayed in case of emergency.

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)

- The Central Council have produced a some [useful guidance](#) on DBS requirements,
- In summary, it is **not** necessary to obtain DBS clearance in order to run a one-off training or taster session, or to accept visitors to a tower, whether they are children or adults.

Permissions and Insurance

- Ensure you have permission from your church and that the church insurance policy covers your event.
- The PCC (through the churchwardens) has ultimate responsibility for the safety of the public. They should know the details of the church's insurance policies. And visits must be made with their knowledge and approval.
- The PCC and Wardens are responsible for the safety of anyone within church buildings, so tower visits must be made with their knowledge and approval. If you regularly organise tower visits, they may be happy to delegate the detailed arrangements to you, but for a first or one-off visit you should discuss what you plan to do in advance. The church insurance should cover the activity, providing it is conducted in a safe and responsible way, but you should check.
- Ecclesiastical (EIG, which insures many churches) includes a section on tower tours in its [Health & Safety Guidance](#). This is guidance, not regulation, so complying with the guidance doesn't absolve you from responsibility for the specific situation in your tower. In some cases you will need to impose more stringent constraints to operate safely, but equally in others you may be able to relax some constraints, providing you can demonstrate that you plans and precautions are well thought out and safe.
- In the case of Heritage Open Days, separate insurance is often arranged, although there are exceptions. [Details of the cover](#) can be found at the Heritage Open Days website.

Don't allow yourself to be suffocated by rules, but do demonstrate an awareness of public safety and show you have made an effort to mitigate any potential risks. This is essential to ensure that your church's insurance cover is maintained.



6. The Welcome

Reception

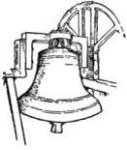
- A '**meet and greet**' area, ideally outside the church is a good idea.
- Your Guild or Association may have publicity stands which you can borrow for the day.
- A gazebo makes a good focal point for people to head for, especially with some chairs and a few bell ropes hung from the sides!
- Have **local ringers on hand to welcome people**.
- Have someone in charge of **refreshments**.

Registration

- Have a clip board to write down everyone's name, phone number and email address. IF YOU ARE RECRUITING THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THE DAY.
- If you haven't enrolled people in advance and there's a lot of interest, you might need to give out tickets indicating which session a visitor has been allocated to.

Safety Talk

- Each visit should start with a brief explanation of safety precautions, fire alarms (if you have them) and the evacuation procedure.
- You will want your visitors to take responsibility for their own safety (no scarves or loose clothing, no feet over the edge of boxes, no crossed legs etc.), especially if you are giving them a practical session.
- You could consider giving each visitor a handout with this information as they'll be more likely to read and think about it while they're waiting.
- Your Risk Assessment will almost certainly have identified some parts of the visit where access will be more difficult (for example a climb up a spiral staircase). Make sure you highlight these difficulties and indicate :-
 - where access is unsuitable for those who are elderly, infirm, disabled, pregnant, suffer from heart or respiratory disorders or from any other medical condition.
 - where suitable clothing and footwear should be worn



7. The Visit

Explanation of English change ringing

- A good thing to do while people are waiting to access the tower.
- Explain the difference between chiming (as in Europe) and full circle ringing.
- Demonstrating using a model will be very useful.

In the Ringing Chamber

- Take small groups (depending on the space you have) to the ringing chamber.
- Start with a basic health and safety instruction reminder - don't touch ropes or move around, keep feet on the floor etc.
- Give a brief introduction (number of bells, biggest and smallest, weights etc).
- Have a ringer demonstrate a few strokes. If you have cctv or a webcam in the belfry get them to watch the bell turning over as it's rung.

In the Belfry

If you choose to include a Belfry tour :-

- Take small groups up to see the bells if safe to do so.
- Ear defenders are a good idea.
- Give a brief explanation of parts of the bell and how they work.
- Liaise with person in charge in ringing chamber (shout down or use a mobile phone) and arrange for one bell to be turned over 2 or 3 times. Any ringing must be preceded by clear agreement between the stewards at all levels that it is safe, and visitors in the upper levels should be advised to cover their ears.
- A new tour should not commence until all visitors on the previous tour have descended and have been accounted for

If you decide that a Belfry tour would not be practical, there are other ways in which you can convey to your visitors how the bell movement relates to what the ringer does :-

- A model if you have one.
- A camera in the bell chamber, with a display in the ringing room
- Training videos such as George Perrin's [Ropesight](#) have episodes which enable you to see both the ringer and the bell.

Ringling Demonstrations

- Use your local band to give a demonstration of ringing changes or a short method so visitors get the full picture of what you have been talking about.

Taster Session

If you choose to include a 'taster session' :-

- Have a competent trainer on hand.
- There are two options to consider, depending on the calibre of your visitors :-
 - Backstrokes only –
 - Start with the bell up and demonstrate backstrokes only, using an experienced ringer as the 'dummy learner' and getting your visitors to 'shadow' your ringer.
 - Then have your trainer give visitors a few closely supervised backstrokes until they feel comfortable.
 - Chiming only :-
 - For the ringing demonstration (see above) arrange to ring the bells up before and down afterwards.
 - Give each of your visitors the opportunity to chime the tenor.



8. Other Things to See and Do

You may need something to occupy people while they are waiting :-

Ringling 'Stuff'

- A table with ringing paraphernalia: copies of 'Dove', 'Diagrams', books on ringing, copy of The Ringing World and diary, example of a simple method, pictures of bells 'up' and 'down' etc.

Handbells

- On a separate table (with a cloth) and a ringer in charge to supervise people wanting to ring a bell. Perhaps you could organise 6 people to ring rounds, followed by Queens.

Videos

- A picture tells a thousand words ! If you have a laptop or projector you could consider running an introduction to ringing video such as [The Craft Of Bellringing](#) on continuous loop.

Belfry Quiz for Children

- A "Belfry Quiz" or Bell ringing Word search. Create your own word search online at <http://puzzlemaker.discoveryeducation.com/WordSearchSetupForm.asp> or make up your own quiz. Keep it fairly simple. How many bells are there? What's the fluffy bit called? Write the name of a method. What's the proper name for bell ringing?

- With a quiz, make sure you have already given the answers in your introductory talk. Anyone who completes the word search or quiz gets a treat (even the kids!).

Roof

- If your tower has an accessible roof then giving visitors a chance to see your town or village from above can be the crowning attraction of their visit. However, this is obviously where your Risk Assessment is a vital tool. As well as easy access to the roof, you need a high enough parapet wall, non-slippery surfaces and the means to ensure that all visitors are supervised.
- The insurance requirement is that visitors must be in groups of no more than 15 or less, each accompanied by two stewards.

Outside

- Your tower may have interesting features on the outside, but it also helps to give visitors a sense of scale if you show them from the outside where the ringing room window and the louvres are. There may be something else of interest in your churchyard, for example the grave of a famous person.

In the Church

- Don't overlook things in the church likely to be of interest. One of the benefits of ringing is the privileged access it gives to historic buildings, so make the most of any special features.



9. Before They Go

Handout

- Make sure that someone is armed with [blue ringing leaflets](#) to give out to each person, with a sticker with your contact details on the back. Leaflets are available from the Central Council.

The 'hard sell'

- And finally, but very importantly, have enough enthusiastic local ringers around to chat to visitors, telling them why they enjoy their hobby, what a great social element there is, and how welcome they would be if they wish to give it a go.



10. After the Event

Follow-up Session

- No more than 48 hours after the event, contact everyone who came with the offer of a follow-up session for anyone wanting to learn to ring, on..... (make this soon, and within a few weeks at most).
- And if you don't get any takers you will still have 'sown a seed' which may bear fruit later.
- You'll also have done much to raise the profile of bell ringing !