THE CENTRAL COUNCIL OF CHURCH BELL RINGERS

Document 2: Actions needed following an extended period during which church bells have not been rung

NOTE

This document has been prepared by the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers, Stewardship & Management Workgroup. It is being made available in draft form and is likely to be revised as advice regarding Covid-19 is updated. It should be read and acted on, in conjunction with 2 other related documents concerning risk assessments, prior to ringers starting to ring church bells when Covid-19 restrictions are eased.

Although this document may look long, the time taken to make the checks will not be time-consuming if the bells and associated installation were maintained in good condition and rung frequently (a few times a month) until ringing stopped. The longer ago that ringing was stopped and any maintenance was done, then the more thorough the checks required. Some points will be included in the church health and safety procedures and as part of the checks in the church prior to its use. A few key items have been highlighted in red that may have occurred regardless of when the bells were last rung.

Please send any suggestions about this document or its contents to SMINF@CCCBR.ORG.UK

Thank you – CCCBR Stewardship & Management Workgroup

Introduction

These notes offer advice about issues to consider in a health and safety risk assessment of the bells and tower prior to them being rung after an extended period during which the bells have not been rung. This could concern a single bell, manual chimes or change ringing bells. This is being compiled to aid ringers to return to towers to ring bells when restrictions due to Covid- 19 are reduced. They are also applicable after other periods of non-use for whatever reason. The notes may assist incumbents, church officers and church bell ringers; they do not intend to provide comprehensive information about health and safety or risk assessments generally. More information may be found in Document 3: Tower Safety and Risk Assessment.

A risk assessment of the tower and bells will form part of the risk assessment for the whole church. The risk assessment will be completed by the Responsible Person appointed by the Incumbent and it is advised that one or more experienced ringers assist with this. The whole risk assessment should be recorded, dated and the actions completed. Ringers are advised to check that this is done.

Note that any work to bells should be done with the correct permissions and faculties in place and in accordance with all relevant health and safety policies.

Few churches were designed or built to comply with current legislation and many are extremely historic and vulnerable structures. Ringers may be in churches at times when the building is otherwise unoccupied, and also in parts of the building that are separate and less accessible from the rest of the building. Every one has to considered carefully and put in place its own procedures and policies that are suitable.

Most towers with rings of bells are within the jurisdiction of the Church of England. These notes focus on these but the issues are likely to apply to bells in towers owned by other organisations, in churches of other denominations, and also churches elsewhere in the world. Local legislation and circumstances should always be taken into account.

Responsibility for safety

It is important to note that the responsibility for health and safety and risk assessment in a church building rests with the church authorities.
It is best that one or more experienced ringers work together with the church authorities to prepare the risk assessment and that it is dated.
Normally, the Incumbent should have appointed a “Responsible Person” for Health and safety matters. Ringers need to use their experience and

knowledge of ringing and bell installations to assist the church authorities in carrying out and implementing risk assessments within the tower.

Issues to consider

This document is in two parts:

i) The first part covers some issues that should be considered when carrying out a risk assessment prior to conducting checks of the conditions of the bells and their installation in a tower after period of non-use (typically 3 months or more). This can apply equally to towers where no ringing has taken place for many months or for the duration of the COVID-19 related restrictions. This version is specifically written to help with checks prior to ringing for the first time after towers have been closed during Covid-19.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list nor is it all suitable or relevant for every tower but is intended as a guide to those involved to think about what sorts of hazards they may find in their own tower.

ii) The second part is a brief list of things that should be checked as part of a pre-ringing inspection. Again, it is not an exhaustive list but covers the main points. Each installation may have its own idiosyncrasies that require specific consideration and attention.

The church may have its own Risk assessment recording sheets; a tabular format is recommended.

PART 1 – Points to consider prior to conducting a risk assessment on the condition of a tower and bell installation after a period of their non-use	ISSUE AND MITIGATION, BY WHOM, BY WHEN	COMPLETED BY WHOM, DATE, FURTHER ACTIONS, BY WHOM, WHEN
RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS		
1. WHO WILL BE CONDUCTING THE PRE-RETURN INSPECTION AND RISK ASSESMENT?		

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a) Tower and bell inspections should be conducted by at least two people, one of whom should normally be the person responsible for health and safety at the church and is therefore familiar with the environment and the likely hazards. One should be an experienced ringer and therefore be able to advise on ringing related matters. Where such people are unavailable, then suitably experienced person in such environments and likely hazards, and who is acceptable to the church, should complete the risk assessment. They should be accustomed to and capable of moving around the tower and bell chamber.		
b) The person responsible for the church health and safety will not necessarily be the person best qualified to carry out the risk assessment of the tower and bell installation. They should work together either in the tower or afterwards to report and record the findings.		
If in any doubt about the knowledge required, contact your local ringers guild or association, or a professional bell hanger or contact the stewardship and management workgroup at smInf@cccbr.org.uk for advice		
2. ACCESS TO THE TOWER		
a) Permission		
• Permission must be granted by the incumbent and / church wardens prior to the checks		
b) Can the church be entered safely?		

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• Has the building been checked and cleaned in accordance with current Covid-19 cleaning procedures? • Will other users be in the building while the checks of tower and bells are carried out		
• Who will unlock the church and how will social distance and hygiene be maintained?		
c) Can the tower be inspected safely?		
• Are there difficult ladders or trapdoors which could cause an accident?		
• Have the lights and emergency lighting been checked recently?		
• Two people should always be present when working in a tower or bell chamber. Can social distance and hygiene be maintained, or should a lone person carry out the inspection?		
○ If a lone person is to carry out the inspection, how will their safety be assured? Eg by a second person remaining as close as possible and within hearing distance		
○ Who and how will anyone be alerted if there is an accident?		
○ What will the "rescue plan" be?		
○ Consider having an assistant on the phone throughout the inspection, they can take notes of the findings and respond if there is an accident. Any findings should be recorded.		
d) What general hazards may be present?		

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• Could an unauthorised person have been into the tower and moved things, done damage or used anything (eg Ellacombe chiming apparatus)?		
• Bees, wasps, birds or other animals may have got in and caused a hazard (physical or biological)		
• Water ingress may have caused floors to become slippery, caused an electrical hazard or even have caused structural damage		
3. THE RINGING ROOM.		
a) How were the bells left?		
• Is there ANY possibility that any of the bells are up? If so, consider how you can check if it is safe to lower them. (See 4. The bell chamber)		
• Was there any necessary maintenance or repair work pending when the lockdown began, which has not been done yet?		
• Are ropes on a spider or hanging loose?		
b) What other hazards may be present?		
• Trip hazards eg ringing boxes or loose ropes.		
4. BELL CHAMBERS.		
a) Is it safe to enter the bell chamber to carry out a complete inspection?		
• Are the bells ALL down?		
○ If not, can a visual inspection be carried out to ascertain that it is safe to lower them?		

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• Are the clock chimes pulled off?		
• Could animal activity have created a hazard?		
• How accessible are the bells? Do you have to use un-secured ladders or work at heights?		
5. INTERMEDIATE ROOM(S) a) Are there any intermediate room(s) that the ropes pass through? • Any evidence of bird or water ingress? • Are there any items obstructing the path of the ropes?		

PART 2 - POINTS TO CHECK PRIOR TO RINGING BELLS AFTER AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF NON-USE	ISSUE AND MITIGATION, BY WHOM, BY WHEN	COMPLETED BY WHOM, DATE, FURTHER ACTIONS, BY WHOM, WHEN
1. ACCESS TO THE TOWER AND GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS		
• Lights and emergency lighting		
○ Check for correct functioning		
• Electrical installation		
○ Is all as it should be?		
○ If the breaker has tripped, why?		
• Steps and ladders		
○ Are they clean, undamaged, secure?		
• Doors and trapdoors		
○ Are they safe and secure?		
○ Do they move as easily as they should?		
○ Do latches function correctly? (Especially on trapdoors.)		
• Handrails and balustrades		
○ Are these secure and undamaged?		
• Are there any signs of unauthorised access?		
○ If so double check EVERYTHING and make no assumptions		
• Are there signs of animal activity?		
○ Bees, wasps, birds or other animals may have got in and caused a hazard (physical or biological) e.g. sticks pushed through louvres by birds and causing a trip hazard on the frame or obstruction to a moving bell		
• Are there signs of water ingress?		

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○ Water ingress may have caused floors to become slippery, caused an electrical hazard or even have caused structural damage		
2. THE RINGING ROOM.		
• Is there ANY possibility that any of the bells are up?		
○ If so, consider how you can check if it is safe to lower them. (See 4. Bell chambers)		
• Are clock chimes pulled off or not?		
○ Does the clock chime mechanism appear to be working correctly at this level?		
• Visually inspect ropes for rodent damage or other problems		
• Are the Ellacombe hammers released?		
• Was there any necessary maintenance or repair work pending when the lockdown began, which has not been done yet?		
3. THE CLOCK ROOM.		
• If the clock has not been wound, it may have run down and the weights bottomed out. Before and during the first winding the wire ropes should be checked to ensure that they have not slipped off the pulleys.		
• Is there anything in the clock room obstructing the passage of the ropes? Especially if ropes pass through the clock or clock case.		
• Visually inspect ropes for damage.		

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• Does the chiming mechanism appear to be in order at this level? i.e. no stray or broken hammer wires which could indicate a hammer not pulled clear of a bell.		
• Do any guiding pulleys run freely?		
• Do rope guides or slap boards appear to be in order?		
4. THE BELL CHAMBER		
• Are the bells ALL down?		
○ If not, can a visual inspection be safely carried out to ascertain that it is safe to lower them?		
• Is there anything inside any raised bell? e.g. rainwater		
• Is there anything in or near the pit or frame which might obstruct the bell in its movement?		
• Are any clock or Ellacombe hammers clear of the path of bell and its fittings?		
• Lower the bell or bells with caution in all cases before proceeding to the rest of the inspection		
• Is the installation free of any debris that may impede the movement of the bells?		
○ Check for fallen masonry or woodwork, fallen sound control materials and debris brought or pushed in by animals or birds. For example, nesting material.		
• Are any sound control mechanisms in good order and undamaged?		
• Are sensors and associated cables etc secure and undamaged?		

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• Is the frame bonded to the lightning conductor?		
○ Check for loose connections or damaged/missing tapes		
• Has any work been done in the tower since last ringing?		
○ Check that work has not placed or fitted anything in the path of any bell, stay or rope. E.g. phone mast cables run through the spokes of a bell wheel (yes, it has happened!)		
5. THE BELLS		
• Are all the stays present and undamaged?		
○ Look for cracks where the stay meets the headstock (and/or U-bolt where present)		
• Do Hastings dinglers move freely?		
• Do the sliders move freely?		
• Are wheels and stays secure on headstocks?		
○ During hot weather, timber components will shrink and may become loose (stays especially)		
○ Note: When checking tightness of bolts with a spanner always test by loosening the nut, then re-tighten if necessary. That way you won't strip threads or over tighten anything.		
• Are the clappers secure? Particularly on bells with timber headstocks.		
• Inspect gudgeons and headstock bolts for damage or looseness.		
• Do all ground pulleys run freely?		

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• Do all sliders move freely?		
• Are all clock hammers pulled well clear of the bell and its fittings?		
• With the clock hammers released (and wearing ear protection) check that the hammers are just clear of the bell and not resting on it. A 6 to 12mm (1/4 to 1/2") gap is usual		
• Are there any undue creaks or scraping noises when each bell is swung gently?		
• Does each bell swing for a while after being given a push? If swinging stops very quickly the bearings may need attention (but check again for other obstructions)		
○ Check that plain bearings have been well oiled. Do not attempt to grease or oil ball race bearings		
• Are the frame tie rods tight (in wooden frames only)?		
○ Dry weather may have caused tie rods to become loose. Check that nuts are not at the bottom of the thread before tightening them. Insert washers if they are, to act as spacers		
• If all seems sound, raise each bell individually		
○ Check that it feels ok and that no undue noises are heard		