



How bell ringers are assessing risk

Risk assessment and mitigation for managing the Coronavirus in bell towers

The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers has considered the general and specific risks associated with the transmission of the Coronavirus so that your bells can be rung. This guidance note has been written to explain to Incumbents and Churchwardens how bell ringers are assessing the risk of ringing bells to make it as safe as possible.

These notes are broadly applicable to the ringing of all bells (except clock bells) – i.e. ringing of one bell, a set of bells rung by one person, or a ring of bells rung by a group of ringers.

This recognises the particular risks of bellringing which are that:

- Groups of ringers ring close together in a circle
- Some ringing rooms are small and with little ventilation
- Some ringing rooms are up narrow staircases
- We touch lots of things that others touch in the course of ringing
- Many ringers are in higher risk groups, as are other church users

Bell ringers are following the Health and Safety Executive's Five steps to risk assessment.

Step 1: Identify the hazards.

Step 2: Decide who might be harmed and how.

Step 3: Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions.

Step 4: Record your findings and implement them.

Step 5: Review your risk assessment and update if necessary.

The Churchwardens and Steeplekeeper will have undertaken checks to ensure the bells are safe to ring following the period of silence.

The Tower Captain has considered how the bells can be rung while:

- Maintaining a safe distance between adjacent ringers
- Observing strict hand hygiene
- Limiting the number of ringers in the tower and the frequency of ringing
- Generally not having extra people in the tower who aren't ringing

Individual ringers will be fully briefed on what to do by the Tower Captain on specific actions and precautions they need to take to keep themselves and their fellow ringers and other church users safe.

Out of necessity, ringing will be very limited in duration and constrained in what is rung; it may not sound the same as it normally would!

Conflicting guidance

We are told that in the case of any conflicting guidance at National, Diocesan or parish level, the guidance on the Church of England Coronavirus website is that authorised by the House of Bishops.

1 What are we worried about?

2 Making your tower as safe as possible

3 Checklist for recommencing ringing

4 Running safe ringing sessions

5 Can I go ringing safely?

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THE CENTRAL COUNCIL OF CHURCH
BELL RINGERS

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Case Study: re-start of ringing in the Isle of Man

Ringling resumed in the Isle of Man in June following the elimination of the virus from the island. The experience at the two towers is a model for how to approach the re-start and what can happen in bell towers when there is no ringing for a while.

Following lockdown in March, the DAC put together a check list of inspection during lockdown. It was only to be done by nominated persons. Those persons were expected to check all rooms within the building. Specialists (bell ringers, organists, etc) were allowed to assist, observing social distancing, lone working rules, etc. (Note that church access permissions differed on the Isle of Man)

The churchwarden at Douglas, who was himself a ringer, checked the tower once a week. On the 7th April, the damage to the plaster ceiling was found. Approximately 4 m² of plasterboard in the corner of the ringing chamber had fallen down. If the tower had not been inspected, this damage would not have been found until ringing resumed, which would have delayed the re-start as a contractor was needed to complete the works.

At another tower, some louvre netting had come down over the bells which had to be removed before ringing started.



Birds nest found after a prolonged period of no ringing

These experiences emphasise the importance of bell ringers working with the church authorities on their area of expertise. Regular inspections are ideal, however a full inspection of the installation prior to ringing should be carried out by an experienced person.

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