Stewardship & Management Workgroup

of The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers

Security
of Church Towers & Bell Ringers

THE CENTRAL COUNCIL OF CHURCH
BELL RINGERS

Introduction

These notes are written to help bell ringers consider their own security and that of the towers that they occupy when ringing. The principles underlying these notes apply to many buildings regardless of function or ownership, and activities. Here we highlight factors that relate specifically to ringers and ringing, rather than those that are more generic. References are drawn from those defined for the Church of England and the UK. Two main topics are included: **Crime** and **Terrorism**

The Threats from Crime

As owners, the Incumbent, PCC and Church Wardens have formal responsibility for ensuring that church and tower security procedures are in place but it is the responsibility of both owners and users - as individuals and organisations - to ensure that procedures are set up and followed.
Procedures must be realistic and proportionate. It is very important that ringers (probably the Tower Captain and/or Steeple Keeper) liaise with church authorities to discuss and draft security procedures.

Some basic security awareness can help ringers to protect churches, towers and bells.
The church of England provides useful guidance here including some top tips for prevention: **churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/crime-and-security-prevention**

Insurers such as Ecclesiastical Insurance (EIG) provide guides for a range of church building crime and security matters including a check list here: **ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/church-security**

Arrangements will always depend on the specific building, situation and local environment, such as -

- size and design
- ground floor ring or not
- urban/rural location
- isolated or overlooked
- and may differ during daylight and after dark.

Since ringers will need access to the tower, perhaps by a different entrance and at different times from the majority of church users, they need to make sure that security and crime prevention arrangements are compatible with their specific requirements.
Procedures for lone working, and for first person in and last person out, are worth defining explicitly.

Ringers often access parts of a church that are not often visited by others, so they may be able to spot disturbance, unusual objects and occurrences that would not readily be seen by other church users. Metal theft, particularly of lead roofing, brasses and small bells (even larger bells), is attractive to thieves.

Ringers need to:

- Be aware of the procedures and practices, with training and updating, ideally including exercises.

- Inform the church authorities when ringers will be in the tower, especially at times that are not routine.

The following points are specific topics for ringers to consider with the church authorities:

Keep Doors and Windows Locked

- High quality locks, meeting current industry standards, are advised for all accessible doors and windows, including those into and through the tower. Remember that even doors and windows that are not normally accessible may still be reached from a ladder or platform, or while scaffolding is erected.
  Security products supported by the police can be found here: **securedbydesign.com**
  Specialist companies will advise on what is appropriate as not all will be suitable for fitting to historic church fabric and specific permission may be required for their installation.

- Locks on intermediate doors on staircases will provide additional security and prevent access to the bell chamber, particularly while the bells are up.

- Doors and windows, their frames, hinges, latches, etc. should be able to withstand any attempts at forcible entry.

- Only a minimum number of the band should be key holders for the tower, ringing room and bell chamber.

- Ringers should consider how the building is secured once they are inside, e.g. for practices. How will late arrivals gain access and how may ringers be contacted (above the noise of bells being rung)? A warning light and/or specific agreed hand signal may be appropriate.

- Clear directions need to be displayed in the tower for how to direct emergency services to the tower and gain access. A postcode may not be sufficiently precise so 'what3words' may also be helpful: **what3words.com**

- Arrangements need to be made so that ringers can access other church facilities such as toilets, first aid and emergency equipment, etc., even while the rest of the church is locked and alarmed.

Keep Keys Safe

- Physical keys and key codes must be kept secure, ideally not on the premises, even if considered to be 'hidden'.

- Have a secure key register, usually retained by the Church Wardens, recording name and contact details of those holding keys to the bell tower, with period checks of holdings.

- Keys and codes should not be copied or shared further.

- Define a process in case keys or codes are lost.

Protect High-Value Items

- Identify and keep an inventory, with photos, serial numbers, etc., of high value items in the tower.
  Mark items visibly or invisibly, as long as marking does not compromise the object, particularly if it has historical significance.

- Do not leave money in the tower.

- Handbells, computers, trophies and other valuable and/or attractive items must be properly secured, out of sight, and with appropriate insurance.

- Consider the security of other items of little monetary value that are in the tower, but are of historic interest or use to ringers such as peal books, registers, records and other artefacts.

Consider the Security of Ringers, Visitors and their Property

- How secure are car parking and cycle racks?
  Ringers may wish to consider where they leave their car or cycle.

- How are the credentials of visitors checked to ensure that they are bona fide?
  Ringers may visit a tower for a practice unannounced and there may even be other church visitors or deliveries.
  Good communication between ringers and church workers will help prevent awkwardness if access were to be denied or allowed inappropriately.

- Alarms and CCTV need to cover all levels of the tower.
  Security patrols, for example in larger churches and cathedrals, should also consider these areas.

- Can alarms in the tower be isolated during ringing, leaving the rest of the church alarm active?

- Alarm (de)activation must be controlled in the same manner as locks and keys.

- Are tools and other items such as ladders or flammable materials that could be exploited by criminals, minimised or secured appropriately?

- Are all paths, steps and doorways used by ringers well lit?

- Are hiding places for people or objects minimised?

- Consider carefully what information is provided on church notice boards, magazines, web pages and ringers' personal and society social media, etc.
  What will be informative to some people, may also be very helpful for miscreants!
  More advice is available here: **ncsc.gov.uk**

Threats from Terrorism

Thankfully terrorist attacks are rare but it is wise for ringers to be alert, not alarmed. Time is well spent considering the safety and security of towers and ringers. Information, guidance and on-line training are available for example here: **gov.uk/government/organisations/national-counter-terrorism-security-office**

Professional Advice, Guidance and Training

Ringers, particularly the Tower Captain and/or Steeple Keeper, are advised to help the church authorities define counter terrorism arrangements for ringers and the tower areas.

Larger and high profile churches and cathedrals will already have links with a Counter Terrorism Security Advisor (CTSA). CTSAs are based regionally via local police forces. CTSAs provide guidance and advice, rather than direction, that can be considered for each location. They also offer local training sessions.

Advice & Guidance

- For specific types of venues, including places of worship, can be found here:
  gov.uk/government/publications/crowded-places-guidance
  It provides advice on the types of threat and will assist those writing emergency plans and policies for various scenarios.

- Further guidance: **cpni.gov.uk**

- National threat levels are set and updated: **gov.uk/terrorism-national-emergency**

Training

- A useful short course entitled Action Counters Terrorism (ACT): **ct.highfieldelearning.com**
  is available for free and can also help those writing emergency plans and policies. It is in sections

and will help ringers understand the risks and how they should respond.
Records may be maintained of who has been trained with period refresher sessions.
(Traditionally, no ringing in Holy Week is an opportune time for updating tower records, as well as tidying the belfry!)

Ringers may well be familiar with the principles of counter terrorism from training in their workplace, school or college, but they should ensure that they know and understand emergency plans defined for the church where they ring, otherwise there may be less effective outcomes in the event of an emergency.

Emergency Plans

A simple **action list** indicating what to do in the event of an incident should be prepared by the church authorities, and ringers should check that a copy is readily available in the ringing room for use in an emergency.
The response to an incident will be dependent on the nature of the occurrence and this may well change as the situation unfolds, so clear means of communication are vital.

Churches and ringers must <u>not</u> assume that fire evacuation plans can be implemented during a terrorist incident. Depending on the circumstances, staying <u>inside</u> the building may be safer than going outside. Different procedures are therefore required and the means of alerting people, including ringers, must be distinctly different from fire alarms. Remember that alarms and procedures should consider those with disabilities - not only audible (deafness), not only visual (visually impaired), effective for the less mobile, etc.

There should also be plans for heightened security and safety arrangements in the event of either an increase in a specific risk such as lead thefts locally, or higher terrorism threats more widely. These may include people always arriving and leaving in pairs, securing additional doors that would normally be left insecure, etc.

As each tower is unique, it is impossible to provide universal rules.
Security measures include those for physical property, personnel, personal and cyber security:

Physical Property

The principles for protecting physical assets are to **deter**, **detect**, **delay**, as well as to have plans for action in the event of an incident. Ultimately, there is legislation that organisations should adhere to, including The Health & Safety at Work Act.

- **Deter**: Reduce the opportunities for adversaries to gain access to people and items that may enable them to carry out an attack

- **Detect**: Maintain a watch for activity or objects that may be out of the ordinary

  An attack is likely to be preceded by information gathering and ringers may well be able to spot people, objects or activities that are out of the ordinary. **Reporting suspicious behaviour** is an important aspect of prevention and policies need to include when behaviour should be reported and to whom, also considering the safety of the individual if they decide to challenge, and balanced by the fact that churches are usually of public interest so not every visitor is suspicious in the first instance.

  The HOT (**Hidden**, **Obviously suspicious**, **Typical**) protocol is helpful as an aide memoire for people when checking suspicious objects.

- **Delay**: Have measures in place that will hamper any attack: reinforcement of physical infrastructure; processes for people to follow; allowing time for a response once a threat has been detected.

Personnel Security

This includes the processes to ensure that people present have bona fide intentions.
As for crime prevention, it is important for church authorities and ringers to know who legitimately accesses the building at any time and their role, but also recognising that churches are public places.

Personal Security

Protecting oneself relies on physical security of the tower and also the routes used to and from them. On-line information about individuals and groups is extensive and can be very detailed and informative! Security guidance for individuals and families: **ncsc.gov.uk/section/information-for/individuals-families**

Guidance encapsulated in '**Run**, **Hide**, **Tell**' is specifically for a 'marauding' attack for example in a knife or gun attack: **gov.uk/government/publications/stay-safe-film**

Cyber Security

Cyber theft and damage is an increasing threat, and risks exist for ringers and their communities. Information on the safe use of devices and on-line safety: **ncsc.gov.uk/section/advice-guidance/all-topics**

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