



Stewardship & Management Workgroup

of The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers



THE CENTRAL COUNCIL OF CHURCH
BELL RINGERS

Offering Advice on Bells and their Towers

Introduction

Bell ringers may be asked to provide advice on bells and their installation in a tower. In some churches, there may be some relevant knowledge amongst the PCC, church wardens and clergy, but often there may be little or no knowledge, even if the bells are rung routinely. Bells are often valuable assets, in terms of both monetary and historic value.

These notes are therefore written to help ringers who may be asked to provide advice on bells. Although advice from professionals and companies will be mentioned, the aim of this document is to help volunteers.

The notes are written considering bells in Church of England towers but the points may be applicable for bells elsewhere even though some of the details regarding ownership, permissions and legal matters may differ.

Requests for advice may come from various people interested in the bells and tower, for example:

- Church Officials: incumbent, PCC members and church wardens
- Local Community: the church congregation, parishioners and general public
- Bell Ringers: locally and/or nationally
- Contractors: may need to know as part of their own work and safety (architects, builders, conservators, emergency services)
- Inspectors: preparing a quinquennial inspection
- In preparation of a Statement of Significance

Quinquennial Inspections

The condition of the tower and bells of the church should normally be included but it is unusual for an inspector to have a detailed knowledge of bells and the associated infrastructure.

Inspectors completing their report may therefore require a specific report on the condition of the bells and tower from an appropriate specialist.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/quinquennial-inspections>

The advice requested will also vary, it could be very specific or quite broad. For example, one or more of the following:

- Help with a specific problem.
- The condition overall of the bells and associated installation.
- The environment and its suitability for recruiting, training and retaining bell ringers.
- Plans for restoration or the addition of bells.
- Proposed alterations in the church that may affect the bells.
- Local history and heritage: bells and their fittings may be decades, even centuries old.
- Commemoration of people or events, locally or nationally.

These notes will focus on the condition of the bells, their maintenance, and ringing environment. Who is best placed to provide advice will depend on the nature of the enquiry.

This document aims to supersede a document produced by the CCCBR Towers & Belfries Committee entitled *The Bell Adviser* (1989, with 1998 Revision).

Who may be able to Offer Advice

Ringers may be asked for advice of offer advice because they hold one or more positions, for example -

- A knowledgeable ringer, perhaps about a specific problem.
- A member of the local ringers' society, with more expertise.
- A member of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers (CCCBR) Stewardship and Management Work Group (SMWG).
- The Bell Advisor to the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC), appointed by the DAC to advise the DAC.

More specialist expertise may also be required from professional bell hangers, bell historians, structural engineers, designers, architects, heritage bodies, specific contractors, etc., with appropriate Professional Indemnity insurance. Advisers may recognise where such further advice is needed and refer the church authorities to such specialists.

Initial Points to Consider

What advice is required will depend on what is known and the overall aims. Preliminary discussions may clarify the requirements and advisers may need to visit the church tower to see the bells and associated installation, as well as meeting key church workers.

It will be useful for advisers to access and review copies of information about the tower and bells, whether held by the church, local ringing society, diocesan, county and even national records. There is extensive information available openly either online or in books that will provide background information such history, architecture, heritage aspects, people involved, etc., but assessments of the current condition and recommendations on maintenance, etc. will almost certainly require a visit to the tower and a detailed inspection.

Any activity in a church must be done with the knowledge and formal agreement of the church authorities, as owners.

Before any checks in the tower and bells, a specific risk assessment should be completed by the person responsible for church health and safety, with someone who has knowledge of bell towers. Lone working must not occur.

Tower visits are best timed for spring or autumn when temperatures are neither too hot as in summer, nor too cold in winter. Spring, however, may be the time when birds may be nesting in or around the tower; all birds, their nests and eggs are protected by law, with certain exceptions (*Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981*). If there is evidence of birds in the tower, protection for bird borne viruses should be included. Similarly, all bat species, their breeding sites and resting places are fully protected by the same law, so should not be disturbed.

Prior to entering the bell chamber, there must be consideration of the integrity of ladders, trap doors, floor boards and beams, etc. If the bells and tower have been unused for a long period, the structural integrity of the installation may have been compromised and pose serious risks. Whether volunteers or professionals, *Work at Height Regulations 2005* must be followed.

Two, or perhaps a few more people, should be involved in any assessment, including one from the church with local knowledge and one or more who can ring bells (if judged safe to do so) and have relevant knowledge about bells and their installations. Individual advisers may have particular knowledge so those involved will spot and contribute more than one person alone. It is appropriate to involve a less experienced person in the group, who may be wishing to learn and build their expertise - learning and training others are very important activities.

The people involved in the assessment should be advised of relevant church procedures, including safety and emergency procedures, security protocols, etc. Suitable clothing and protective equipment must be worn by those involved. Appropriate insurance arrangements should be in place.

Young people, under 18, may be encouraged to observe and assist with assessments. This will motivate and support them in learning about bells and their maintenance. In all cases, appropriate parental consent must be obtained, health and safety, and safeguarding procedures followed.

The church authorities should normally agree what advice is required and on what basis; considerations will include:

- For whom the work is being done.
- The scope of the assessment.
- Timescales for the assessments.
- How the advice is to be provided and to whom, for example usually a written report with presentations to church.
- Confidentiality and copyright - whether the report may be shared, and with whom.
- Whether any minor maintenance may be carried out during the assessment.
Apart from minor maintenance, work in a church, including work on bells, requires a Faculty or Archdeacon's Certificate. Until this permission has been requested formally and agreed, no work can legally be undertaken.
- Whether volunteers will be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses.

A contract will normally be required with a commercial company but requirements may be agreed more informally with volunteers.

Volunteers should only offer advice within the limits of their knowledge and decline to do so on other aspects. They should declare any limitations of their advice, including commercial or other interests that may affect their advice. Professional bell hangers will offer advice on an agreed commercial basis.

Preparation for a Tower Visit

The following points may serve as reminders:

- Agree dates, start and finish times.
- Schedule enough time - reduce any temptation to rush, leave time for the unexpected .
- Key holder and access.
- Two or more people involved, with some experienced ringers to ring the bells.
- Personal protective equipment (hard hat, boots, dust mask, ear defenders, goggles, overalls...).
- Lighting, torches (head torches are very useful).
- Power supply, extension leads.
- Equipment and tool kit, strong hands-free carrying bag, rags, rubbish bags.
- Ruler, measuring tape.
- Notebook, pens and pencils, camera, phone (check if in range of a signal), chalk marker.
- Facilities for changing, washing, eating, etc.

In the Tower

How to complete the work in the tower is partly a matter of choice, partly determined by what is required. What will be achieved may also be limited by what is found, especially unexpected issues.

An initial 'walk through' to ensure that the environment is safe and to spot any key points is probably advisable and helpful.

Even if you think you have an exceptional memory, take notes carefully all the time!

Sketches are often helpful with dimensions, and photographs (*'a picture is worth a 1000 words'*) with annotation.

Hint: A light chalk mark on an object, for example a bell number on a component, will help identification in photographs. Do not use pens or markers.

After initial checks it is best to work systematically. Logic may determine if this is from top to bottom, or vice versa. When looking at the bells and their fittings, one bell at a time may be preferred, or a check of the same component of every bell, for example all the wheels, then all the sliders and stays, etc. One bell at a time has the merit of requiring less movement around the tower, while looking at one component on every bell may highlight common features. Chalk can be used to mark items that have been checked. *Hint: On a repeat visit, working in a different sequence may enable different points to be spotted.*

It is helpful if advisers point out key findings to church staff informally during the assessment, then confirm these in writing.

Normally, no remedial actions are undertaken during a tower visit, other than to resolve any essential safety issues. Minor remedial maintenance may also be completed if that is agreed.

Writing the Findings as a Report

This section offers suggestions for reporting on a full inspection; depending on the requirements less detail may be appropriate. The style and what is included will depend on the advice requested and the purpose. For any report a short summary is helpful as an introduction and for less specialist readers, with the full report providing a more detailed record. The information needs to be clear and with technical jargon explained. Pictures, diagrams and tables are more helpful than lengthy text. A suggested outline of a detailed report is included in the Appendix.

Most of the report should comprise factual information and findings. Some of the contents may quote pre-existing information, be tentative, be incomplete or be different from previous reports. In such cases, the circumstances should be indicated clearly, giving reasons, explanations and references. Opinions should be identified as such, with reasons.

It is advised that the observations are recorded first, followed by a clear set of recommendations. Recommendations should be informative and factual, particularly if they are highlighting likely risks, with an indication of priority for attention. For example, do:

- ... to prevent danger and/or damage.
- ... to make the bells safe to chime, swing-chime or ring full-circle.
- ... to manage noise levels for the listening public and/or ringers.
- ... to enhance the environment for ringers and visitors.
- ... to improve the mechanical condition of the bells for the longer term.

Recommendations may be accompanied by options, followed by the merits and drawbacks of each. Remember that not all readers will be familiar with technical or specialist jargon.

Note that it will often be other people or groups that will contribute to, and make the final decision on, what may or may not be done: Diocesan Advisory Committee, heritage bodies, as well as the incumbent and church authorities, often considering finance that may be available.

It is inappropriate to comment on whether permissions will be granted.

Where appropriate, advisers may suggest who may be willing and able to undertake the actions or provide further information. This will be without bias.

The report should be written in good faith and to the adviser's best ability. A statement to this effect should be added to show that neither the adviser, nor any body to which the adviser belongs, will accept legal liability for the report and the advice contained.

Example Proformas

Bell advisers may have their own preference for how to record their observations during a tower visit. Forms may remind advisers of points to check and their progress while doing so.

Suggested examples of what to assess and record during a tower visit are available separately on the CCCBR website: cccbr.org.uk.

These can be customised and used during the tower visit, and appended to the report.

Further Information

Local Ringing Societies

Affiliated to the CCCBR (Central Council of Church Bell Ringers): cccbr.org.uk/about/affiliated-societies

Some Commercial Companies

- Loughborough Bell Foundry: taylorbells.co.uk
- Whites of Appleton: whitesbellhangers.co.uk
- Nicholson bell hangers: nicholsonbellhangers.com
- Matthew Higby bell engineers: bellhangers.com
- Andrew Higson, pianos, bells, organs, clocks, consultancy: exaudite.co.uk
- Blyth & Co: churchbellspecialists.co.uk

Reference Materials

Some of these may be available from ringing society libraries:

- *Towers and Bells*, Alan J Frost, CCCBR, 1995: available from the CCCBR shop: cccbr.org.uk/product-category/maint-rest
- *The Development of British Bell Fittings*, Trevor S Jennings, 1991: available second-hand
- *The Craft of the Bellfounder*, George Elphick, Phillimore, 1988: available second-hand
- *Bellframes*, Christopher J Pickford, 1993: available second-hand
- *Timber Bellframes - Technical Pamphlet 14*, The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, 2003: available from SPAB Bookshop: spab.org.uk/shop
- *Manual of Belfry Maintenance*, CCCBR, 2017: available from the CCCBR shop: cccbr.org.uk/product/manual-of-belfry-maintenance
- *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981*: available from The Stationery Office: tsoshop.co.uk
- *Work at Height Regulations 2005*: see Health & Safety Executive: hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/the-law.htm
- *Conservation and repair of bells and Bellframes - Code of Practice*, Church House Publishing, 2002: churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/CCB_Code-of-practice_Conservation-and-repair-of-bells-and-bellframes_2007.pdf
- *Bells and Bell Ringing*: Information on the Church of England website: churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/bells-and-bell-ringing
- *Statements of Significance*: Information on the Church of England website: churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/statements-significance-and-needs

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Additional Information

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Version Control

| Version | Date | Author | Format/Copy Editor | Changes |
|---------|----------|--------------|--------------------|---------|
| 1.0 | Jan 2021 | Alison Hodge | Susan G Hall | |

Appendix

Outline report structure

A clear structure is helpful for the reader - what follows is a suggested outline for a detailed report but this may be amended to fit the requirements. Version control is helpful to avoid confusion, particularly indicating the final version.

Cover Page

- Title
- Date
- Authors

Acknowledgements

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- With page numbers

Summary

Main Text Sections

- **Introduction and Background**
 - Context
 - Work required
- **Record of Activities Undertaken**
 - The tower and access
 - Ringing-room (from where the bell ringers ring the bells)
 - Any intermediate spaces
 - Bell chamber (where the bells themselves are installed)
 - Bell frame (main framework that supports the bells)
 - Bell gear (associated fittings – headstocks, wheels, sliders, stays, ropes, etc.)
 - Bells
 - Additional equipment associated with the bells - clocks, clock-hammers, carillons, etc.
 - *Each item may be described (and for each bell) referring to:*
 - *Type*
 - *Material*
 - *Design*
 - *Likely age*
 - *Condition*
 - *Any specific rare or unusual features*
- **Key Findings and Observations**

Conclusion and Recommendations

Glossary

References

- By section

Bibliography

Appendices

- Copy of completed proforma

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