

TOWER ADVISER'S REPORT

The beginning of this reporting year saw the retirement of Jim Taylor to whom I owe many thanks for his guidance and support over my years as his Assistant. I was appointed as Tower Advisor at the Easter AGM along with two new Assistant Tower Advisors, Roland Backhurst and Bernard North, and I would like to thank them for their increasing help and support with tower inspections.

During the Association's reporting year there were nineteen tower inspections and reports, the same as last year. Eight of these were final inspection reports following work being completed, and eleven were initial inspections. The eight final inspections were at Shepton Mallet (the 8 bells were retuned and re-hung with structural improvements), Burrington (refurbished and re-hung clappers), Nynehead (all bells were re-hung on steel headstocks, the peal were retuned and structural improvements made), Charlton Adam (complete restoration of this ring of 5), Chilcompton (augmented to 12 by the addition of two new trebles), Priddy (augmented to 6 with a new treble), Tolland (installation of a new light ring of 8) and Cannington (new cast iron clappers fitted).

Of the eleven initial inspections five resulted in straightforward recommendations covered by housekeeping, maintenance and minor repair. These were at Berrow, Shipham, Luxborough, Wick St Lawrence and Clevedon All Saints. Maintenance work was needed at Taunton St James and longer term suggestions to improve the ring were made. The Long Ashton inspection recommended short term treatment of the metal frame and possibly re-hanging on modern bearing races. Chilton Cantelo 5 bells are not currently rung but work is planned to repair the tower structure, and various options are being discussed to get them ringing regularly again.

The remaining initial inspections were unusual. The three bells at Rimpton require significant work before they can be safely rung full circle again. The three at Middle Chinnock require repair and maintenance work before they are rung again. Finally, most unusual of all, from a distance we inspected the two external bells in the stone gable above Thorne Coffin Church where the ropes had parted and scaffolding is needed to gain access.

A significant number of these inspections revealed unnecessary deterioration due to a lack of maintenance. In some cases ageing steeple keepers and very difficult access contributed to this situation, in others it seemed to be a lack of understanding of the need for regular maintenance. The Tower Advisory Service section on the B&WDACR website has links giving suggestions for suitable reading material, and in particular I would recommend the booklet "Schedule of Regular Maintenance" as a good basic overview. This booklet is also a starting point for the excellent Bell Maintenance course organised by Janet Wyatt, our Deputy Education Officer and led by James Clarke of the Towers and Belfries Committee of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers.

JOHN HALLETT