

Health and Safety in the Bell Tower

This list is intended for Tower Captains and Steeple-keepers if you have one. It is not an exhaustive document but includes some helpful notes on various aspects of health and safety in the tower. I am sure that experienced Tower Captains and Steeple-keepers will know most of the information included, so this is not really for them. It is really intended to help less experienced people who very often find themselves taking on these roles. We hope that it will be a document that they can dip into, and that it will help them to feel more skilled and confident in their role.



The Tower Captain is responsible for ensuring that risk assessments are in place for all the activities that take place in the tower e.g. bell handling for learners, bellringing, bell maintenance, etc.

A written record or Risk Assessment should be kept of all the precautions taken to minimise the risks associated with bellringing activities e.g. training, bell maintenance, tower maintenance, etc.

The Tower Captain or PCC may delegate responsibility for important work within the tower to appointed and suitably experienced tower members, eg a steeple-keeper, tutor, etc.

Electrical Installations

- Alteration or addition to the electrical installations in the tower must be carried out by a qualified electrician
- The church authorities must give permission for such work, and some work may require the Archdeacon's permission or a Faculty

Electrical Equipment

- Anyone using such equipment must be able to operate it safely
- Any such equipment used in a tower must be in good condition and be annually PAT tested

Lighting

- Adequate lighting and power points should be provided on all levels of the tower, and will therefore be available for all tasks undertaken in the tower
- There should be emergency lighting, in case of a mains failure, in all areas of the tower – ringing room, intermediate or clock rooms, belfry and stairs.
- If any lighting needs installing or improving consult with PCC/Churchwardens to have this work completed



Heating

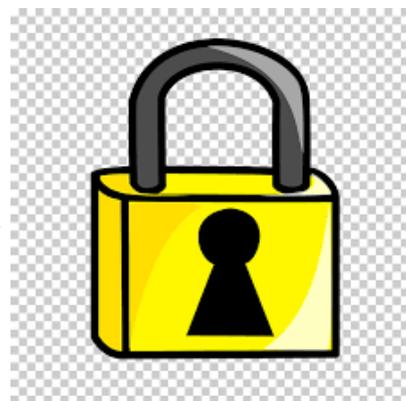
- Equipment using naked flames should not be used
- Hot element radiant heating (eg, infra-red or quartz-ray) should only be used if the equipment is permanently fixed in a safe place
- Portable heaters (eg, convectors) must be kept at a safe distance from flammable materials and switched off when no-one is present
- Any heating equipment must be PAT tested each year. Consult with the Churchwarden to arrange this

Church Fire Plan

- The Church Fire Plan should include the tower
- The Tower Captain should ensure that anyone who comes into the tower in connection with bellringing activities is aware of this plan
- The fire extinguishers in the tower should be in agreed fixed locations
- They should be checked annually with the other church fire extinguishers. Consult with the Churchwarden to arrange this

Entrance to the Tower

- The entrance to the tower, ringing room, bell chamber, etc. should always be kept locked when not in use for ringing, maintenance, etc.
- Ground floor rings where this is not possible should ensure that the ropes are pulled up out of normal reach, even when they are down. The control for letting down the ropes should be locked
- There should always be a sign at the entrance to the tower if anyone is working at higher levels in the tower
- Smoking should not be permitted anywhere in the tower or on the roof



Maintenance

Health and Safety in the Bell Tower

- It is important that regular maintenance is carried out on all aspects of the installation
- If there isn't anyone able to carry out this task, then contact the local Association Branch Maintenance Officer or a Bell Hanger
- If a Bell Hanger is used, obtain the PCC or Churchwardens permission before contacting them
- Any work to the installation should conform to the Church Building Council's Code of Practice

Leaving bells up or down

- Bells should always be left down when the tower is vacated, unless they can safely be left up. Bells may only be safely left up if -
 - all bells and ropes are inaccessible and access to them is kept locked
 - this includes any intermediate chambers between the ringing room and the bell chamber
 - the keyholders are ringers, or people trained in awareness of the hazards of bellringing
 - notices warning that the bells are up are displayed at each point of access to the bells and bell ropes
 - the locked spaces are not through routes to other parts of the church

The Ringing Room

- This room should be kept locked when not in use
- Fire exit notices should be posted on appropriate doors
- Signs that can be put up when the bells have been left up should be available
- Signs that can be put up when someone is in the bell chamber or intermediate chamber should be available
- Furniture in this room should be placed safely out of the way of anyone ringing
- Ropes should be pulled up out of normal reach when not in use
- Where the Church has a ground floor ring, particular attention should be made to securing the ropes from casual interference. A locked panel or box should be provided for this by the Parish, as part of the Church's Health and Safety audit.



Ringling, Ringers and Visitors

- The Tower Captain, or other appointed person, must take reasonable steps to ensure that all ringers, including visiting ringers, are competent to ring
- Competent means that ringers have sufficient experience and expertise, in the opinion of the Tower Captain or other appointed person, to ring safely
- The Tower Captain, or other appointed person, responsible for the ringing should ensure that ringers ring bells suitable for their ability



- A person stating that they are a ringer but whose ability is unknown should be invited to ring one of the easier bells to begin with. A suitable ringer should stand nearby to help if the ringer is unable to control the bell
- Only appointed, experienced ringers should be allowed to be responsible for teaching
- People who are being trained in bell ringing, or who are inexperienced bell ringers, should only be allowed to ring if they are adequately supervised
- Non-ringers should always be accompanied and supervised by a ringer. Verbal warnings about not touching anything, staying well away from the ropes and ringers when ringing is in progress, staying seated if possible, keeping feet on the floor, etc., should be used
- Visiting ringers and visitors should be made aware of all appropriate safety precautions

Access to the Tower

- Access to every part of the tower and the bells and frame, etc, should be safe
- Access to any part of the tower, apart from the Ringing Room, should be restricted to those who have been approved by the Tower Captain and the PCC to do work on the bells, frame, fittings, etc.

The Bell Chamber

- This room is kept locked, and entry only allowed for specific reasons which could include -
- Maintenance of the bells, frame and fittings; and teaching of maintenance skills
- Teaching of ringing. In this case there must be a suitable safe space for both the students and teacher to stand to view the bells
- In either case supervision by a suitably qualified person is essential

Health and Safety in the Bell Tower

- Anyone working on the bells should ensure that someone knows where they are, or preferably a second person should be present
- Work should not be carried out on bells which are up, including fitting or removing muffles
- If it is necessary and safe to observe a bell in motion at least two people should be present, one of whom should be a competent ringer
- If a bell is in motion without its clapper being tied ear defenders should be worn
- Any activity, eg maintenance, in any chamber in the tower should be recorded in a log book
- After activity in any chamber in the tower, and before any further ringing takes place, the Tower Captain should ensure that conditions are safe for ringing – there are no obstructions that would endanger people, bells or the fabric of the tower



Clocks

- Do not allow anyone to interfere with the clock, or change clock settings, without the permission of the PCC or Churchwardens. Damage to clock mechanisms are very expensive to repair and not part of the ringers remit