



Central Council of Church Bell Ringers
"Registered Charity number 270036"

Tower Stewardship Committee

Guidance Note No.5

CHURCH LAW IN RELATION TO BELLS

This guidance note gives guidance to ringers, parochial church councils and clergy regarding Church Law affecting the ringing of church bells. Note that different rules apply when the bells are located in a Cathedral.

As most of the ringing towers in the world come under the jurisdiction of the Church of England, it has been produced with this in mind. However, most of the principles addressed will apply to Churches of other denominations and also those outside the UK. It is recommended that, if needed, more specific local advice should be sought.

Church of England law requires that in every church and chapel there shall be provided at least one bell to ring the people to divine service. Most of us have many more than one bell in our towers so we comply with the law in this respect.

It is recommended that regular liaison be held between the ringers and vicar and churchwardens. Bell ringers do not have the automatic right to ring the bells in their tower, but do so with the permission of the vicar and wardens. Churches will usually develop a normal accepted pattern of ringing (ie for services and practice nights). Any extra ringing, for example, for peals and quarters, visiting bands, special services, etc, should be agreed beforehand.

The legal ownership of the bells is vested in the incumbent and the PCC has a duty for their use, care, maintenance and insurance. To this extent, bell ringers are working for the PCC when they carry out routine maintenance on their bells and ropes. Communication between all parties is recommended at all times.

Normally any physical changes to the structure of the building requires some form of permission, usually via the faculty system.

Each Diocese of the Church of England has an Advisory Committee (DAC) and they will have a bell adviser, who may or may not be a member of this Committee. He/She will often be a ringer who is known to the members of the local bell ringing Association or Guild, and can be approached for advice, although his/her role is actually to advise the DAC rather than ringers

generally. The DAC's main responsibilities include: advising the Diocesan Chancellor on the granting of faculties; and advising the PCC in their duty for the care, maintenance and appropriate use of the church building and contents. This will include the bells.

Work on the bells and/or tower will usually require a faculty. A faculty is a permission and is required for all repairs, alterations or additions to Church of England churches and their contents. Faculties are granted by the Diocesan Chancellor and not the DAC, but if there is any doubt as to whether a faculty is needed the DAC secretary should be consulted.

Following the introduction of the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2015, "de minimis" lists used by individual dioceses have been replaced nationally by List A and List B. Items on List A can be implemented without seeking permission, other than of the incumbent and the churchwardens. Items on List B would normally need written permission of the Archdeacon (note that some dioceses have specific forms for applying to the Archdeacon for List B permission). No items on either list would usually require a full faculty application.

As of November 2016, the items relating to bells on these lists are:

List A:

Item	Specific Conditions
The inspection and routine maintenance of bells, bell fittings and bell frames	No tonal alterations are made to any bell No bell is lifted from its bearings
The repair and maintenance of clappers, crown staples (including re-bushing) and bell wheels	Works do not include the re-soleing or re-rimming of a bell wheel No bell is lifted from its bearings
The repair or replacement of bell stays, pulleys, bell ropes (including in Ellacombe apparatus), rope bosses, sliders or slider gear	No bell is lifted from its bearings
The repainting of metal bell frames and metal bell fittings	No bell is lifted from its bearings

List B

Item	Specific Conditions
The lifting of a bell to allow the cleaning of bearings and housings	<p>Regard is had to any guidance issued by the Church Buildings Council</p> <p>The bell is currently in a fit condition to be rung</p>
<p>The like for like replacement of—</p> <p>(a) bearings and their housings</p> <p>(b) gudgeons</p> <p>(c) crown staple assembly</p> <p>(d) steel or cast iron headstocks</p> <p>(e) wheels</p>	<p>Regard is had to any guidance issued by the Church Buildings Council</p> <p>The bell is currently in a fit condition to be rung</p> <p>The works do not involve the drilling or turning of the bell</p>
<p>The replacement of—</p> <p>(a) bell bolts</p> <p>(b) a wrought iron clapper shaft with a wooden-shafted clapper</p>	<p>Regard is had to any guidance issued by the Church Buildings Council</p> <p>The bell is currently in a fit condition to be rung</p>
The treatment of timber bell frames with preservative or insecticide materials	
The re-pinning or re-facing of hammers in Ellacombe apparatus	<p>Regard is had to any guidance issued by the Church Buildings Council</p> <p>The bells are currently in a fit condition to be rung</p>
The introduction of peal boards in a location not normally visible to the public	

Up to date information to items on these lists can be found in the reference below.

The first step for bellringers is to consult their PCC and incumbent and obtain their approval for any proposed work. It is recommended that the DAC bells advisors should also be consulted for items that require either Archdeacons approval (List B) or full faculty application. The PCC and Wardens will normally manage the application for permission or faculty. It should be noted that some dioceses may operate an electronic faculty application system.

The law relating to the noise church bells make and whether that constitutes a nuisance arises under statutory and common law, not Church law. The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers provides a complaints helpline, which offers help to towers. Please see Guidance Note GN7, Noise the Law and The Environmental Health Officer.

Ringers should also be aware of other statutory laws as they apply to bells and bellringing, in particular those laws relating to Health and Safety, Safeguarding, Data Protection and Discrimination. Please refer to other Guidance Notes in this series for additional detail.

Further information on the Faculty Application System, and details of Lists A & B, can be found on the Churchcare website:

<http://www.churchcare.co.uk/churches/guidance-advice/making-changes-to-your-building/permissions/faculty-jurisdiction>

This information should also be available on the website of the appropriate diocese.

Details of the appropriate DAC Bells Advisor can also normally be found on the website of the appropriate diocese. Contact is normally made via the DAC Secretary.

Specific advice on ecclesiastical law relating to the use of church bells may be available from the local archdeacon of diocesan registrar. Again, contact details should be available on the appropriate diocesan web site, or from the diocesan office.

For further information, contact the Chairman of the CCCBR Tower Stewardship Committee:

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Other **Guidance Notes** produced by the Tower Stewardship Committee are:-

GN1 - Insurance

GN2 - Tower Management

GN3 - Child Protection In Towers

GN4 – Tower Safety and Risk Assessment

GN5 - Church Law

GN6 - Fire Risk Assessment and Protection

GN7 – Noise, the Law, and the Environmental Health Officer

GN8 – Data Protection and Bell Ringing

These Guidance Notes can be downloaded free of charge from the Tower Stewardship Committee section of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers website:

<https://cccbr.org.uk/services/tower-stewardship/>