



Parish Bell Tower Health & Safety Policy for St Mary & St Giles and All Saints Churches

The following general principles should be used when considering risk assessment in the bell tower. This is not an exhaustive list, further items may be added following risk assessments for specific events.

A. Initial Procedures

- A1. The bellringer appointed to be in charge of activities related to bellringing in the tower (normally the tower captain or ringing master) should, on appointment, review each activity (eg, bell handling for learners, bellringing, use of boxes, length of bell ropes, putting on muffles, bell maintenance) from a Health and Safety point of view (ie, make Risk Assessments), or should review risk assessments already in place.
- A2. Any new activity should be similarly assessed.
- A3. A written record should be made of precautions (including any training) to be taken to minimise risks associated with bellringing activities and the bellringer-in-charge, on appointment, should confirm that these precautions will be followed.

B. General Precautions

- B1. There should always be an indication at ground level (e.g, at the entrance to the tower stairs) and in the ringing room to show when any persons are in the tower at higher levels. Consider installing an illuminated indicator (i.e. a red light) to indicate this.
- B2. The entrance to the ringing room, bellchamber, and any intermediate chambers should normally be kept locked against unauthorised entry.
- B3. Smoking IS NOT permitted within the tower nor on roofs, stairs, or walkways leading to or from the tower.
- B4. Adequate lighting should be available for any tasks performed in the tower, including provision for emergency lighting in the case of mains failure. Any alteration or addition to the electrical installation, with appropriate authority, should be carried out as recommended in the Churchcare guidance notes and only by a qualified electrician, and with permission of the church authorities.
- B5. Electrical equipment (including portable heating) should be used in the tower only if it has passed its PAT Test and can be operated safely.
- B6. Heating in a tower should not be by equipment using naked flames. Hot element radiant heating (eg, infra-red or quartz-ray) should be used only if the equipment is permanently fixed in agreed safe places. Portable heaters (eg, convectors) shall be used only if kept at safe distances from flammable materials and should not be left switched on when the tower is unattended.
- B7. Non-ringers in a tower must always be accompanied by a competent ringer during ringing and when bells are left mouth upwards (see also C2).
- B8. There should be a Fire Plan for the church, including the tower, and the person-in-charge of the ringers must ensure that all persons in the tower in connection with bellringing activities are aware of it. Fire extinguishers in the tower should be in agreed fixed locations and be checked annually.

B9. Visiting ringers: the person in charge of ringers must be satisfied that all visiting ringers are of adequate competence to be able to ring safely.

B10. Exposed ground floor rings should have a mechanism to ensure the ropes are pulled up out of normal reach, even when the bells are down. The control for letting down the ropes should be locked.

C. In the Bellchamber

C1. Bells should always be kept mouth downwards when the tower is vacated unless they can be safely left inverted, or 'up'. Bells may only be safely left up if:

- all bells and ropes are inaccessible and access to them is kept locked, keyholders being ringers or persons trained in awareness of the hazards of bellringing. This includes intermediate chambers between the ringing room and the bellchamber.
- warning notices are displayed at each point of access to the bells and bellropes.
- the locked spaces are not 'through routes' to other parts of the church.

C2. Entry to the bells and bellframe should not be permitted when the bells are ringing or are set mouth upwards unless there are safe means of locking the bells in the up position, or if it is necessary and safe to observe a bell in motion. Two people should be present in such circumstances of whom at least one should be a competent ringer. If the bell is in motion without its clapper being tied, ear defenders should be freely available and worn.

C3. Safe access should be available to every part of the bell equipment that needs to be maintained, including for the application of muffles.

C4. Whenever any maintenance or other activity has taken place in the bellchamber, or intermediate chambers, this should be recorded in a log book. Before any subsequent bellringing takes place, the bellringer-in-charge of ringers should ensure that conditions are safe for bellringing and that there are no obstructions that would endanger persons, bells, or the fabric of the tower.

C5. The resident ringing master (or other person responsible for tower safety) must take reasonable steps to ensure that they are satisfied that all ringers (including visiting ringers) are competent, in good health and are of suitable height and build. Competent means that ringers have sufficient experience, in the opinion of the ringing master, or are in the process of being trained in bell ringing. The ringing master must warn visiting ringers of the particular circumstances attached to the tower.

TOWER SAFETY GUIDELINE SUMMARY

- Identify the hazards and assess the risks
- Ensure that ropes are not accessible to unauthorised people
- Ensure that the bell chamber is not accessible to unauthorised people
- Display clear warning signs and fire exit notices on appropriate doors
- Ensure that anyone entering the ringing room immediately knows if there anyone is in the bell chamber
- Ensure that someone knows if you are working on the bells or, even better, have someone with you
- Never work on bells which are up, including fitting or removing muffles
- Ensure that non-ringers are always accompanied and supervised
- Only allow appointed, experienced ringers to be responsible for teaching
- Only allow inexperienced ringers to ring if they are adequately supervised
- Check bells are down before making coils