

Conditions of use applying to change-ringing bells

As a general rule, bells should always be left in the 'down' position other than for ringing. This is accepted good practice and provides new ringers with practice in 'ringing up' and 'ringing down'. It also reduces corrosion to the clapper bolt caused by moisture collecting in the bells.



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From a Health & Safety point of view it is extremely hazardous for bells to be left 'up' particularly if fire fighters or others need to enter the tower or if unauthorised persons including children interfere with the ropes. Where local circumstances require bells to be left in the 'up' position these notes are to provide guidance to Bellringers in implementing safe practices. The notes indicate a general safe case that should be interpreted to meet each unique local situation.

General

Bells should be left in the 'down' position when not in use during the working week between 7am Monday and 6pm Friday with Public Holidays excepted.

Outside this period, if bells are left in the 'up' position then the ropes must be hoisted towards the ceiling on a 'spider' and locked in position. Notices warning that the bells are 'up' and that the ropes must not be touched should be displayed in the Ringing Room. The access door to the Bell Chamber must be kept locked, a danger notice exhibited and a single key kept in the control of the Ringing Master or Deputy. If access is required to the Bell Chamber during the weekend, whilst the bells are 'up', then this must be under the control of the Ringing Master or Deputy.

Adult ringers

The resident Ringing Master, or other person responsible for tower safety, must take reasonable steps to ensure that they are satisfied that all adult ringers (those aged 18 years and over) including visiting ringers are competent, in good health, and of suitable height and build. Competent means that ringers have sufficient experience in the opinion of the Ringing Master, or be in the process of being trained in bell ringing. The Ringing Master must warn visiting ringers of the particular circumstances attached to the tower.

Junior ringers

Junior ringers must be at least eight years old. Written consent must be obtained from a parent or guardian for each child to ring or to be taught to ring. Children must be in good health, and of suitable height, build and temperament. Children must be suitably experienced or be in the process of being taught to ring. It should be at the discretion of the Ringing Master as to whether or not a child is suitable. At least one responsible adult other than the Ringing Master (eg the parent of one of the children present, or an experienced adult ringer) must be present when children are in the bell tower. A record should be maintained of each junior ringer's instruction and training and their level of competence.

Special conditions concerning heavy rings of bells

Rings of bells where the Tenor weighs 20cwt or more may additionally be left in the 'up' position during the working week, providing that the following conditions are met.

The bell-frame must be secured against any person being able to come into contact with the bells without the authority of the Ringing Master. This may be done by caging in the bell-frame, fencing any walkway or securing any door adjacent to the bell-frame with materials sufficiently robust to prevent access.

A single controlled door in the cage or screen shall be provided with a single key, which shall remain in the control of the Ringing Master or Deputy whilst the bells are up. Where no access route to another part of the building passes through the bell chamber, the access door to the bell chamber itself may be considered the controlled door.

Turning the clappers of bells up 'wrong'

Where it is necessary to turn the clapper of a bell to the 'right' side after ringing bells 'up' then the following must be observed:

- (a) The procedure for turning the clapper must be specified in detail and approved by Ecclesiastical. A copy shall be displayed prominently in the Ringing Room.
- (b) Only the Ringing Master or other trained deputy shall be allowed to carry out the procedure.

Bell maintenance

All maintenance should be undertaken with the bells 'down' either by, or under the direction of the Steeple-Keeper. A second person should be present with the Steeple-Keeper during maintenance operations to assist and take action in the event of an emergency. Lone working should be avoided. However, where this is not possible, a Steeple-Keeper working alone amongst the bells must take steps to advise another responsible person of their proposed activity and timescale. They must undertake to

advise the responsible person at a prescribed time of the completion of the task. Failing receipt of such advice, the responsible person must take immediate steps to ascertain the safety of the Steeple-Keeper.

Definitions

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- **Ringing Master**
Otherwise Tower Captains or Conductor, being the person with delegated powers from the Incumbent, PCC or alternative authority, with responsibility for the ringing of the bells and safety within the tower.
- **Steeple-Keeper**
The person with delegated responsibility for the general maintenance of the bells.
- **Spider**
Rope and pulley system with hook upon which the ropes can be hung and drawn up towards the ceiling.
- **Ringing room**
Room or area from which the bells are rung.
- **Bell-chamber**
The area of the tower in which the bell-frame is located.
- **'Up' position**
The bell mouth upwards and the bell at rest supported by the stay and slider mechanism in readiness for 'full circle' ringing.
- **'Down' position**
The bell mouth downwards and at rest.
- **'Wrong' position**
Having rung the bell 'up' the clapper is resting against the higher side of the bell mouth (the 'wrong' side) and before ringing can commence the clapper has to be moved over to the lower side.

Sources of information

Working Alone in Safety
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HSE Books, PO Box 1999
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Tel 01787 881165
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