



Bell
Ringers

Church Closure Project



Church Closure Project

In some circumstances our churches, and therefore the bells within those churches, face an uncertain future. Small and dwindling congregations in predominantly rural locations can mean it is not economically viable to keep the church open. Where there are bells hung for change ringing in such locations there is a risk that they may fall silent for ever. One of the objectives of the guild is to promote an interest in the care of all bells in the Diocese. One of the ways in which we can achieve this aim is to provide some guidance to assist our members in retaining access to bells in churches that are no longer functioning as a place of worship on a regular basis. The Guild does not own any of the bells in the diocese and therefore must rely on a good working relationship with the Diocese & other bodies who may become the custodians of redundant churches and the bells within them.

Where a closure or change of status occurs special attention should be given to supporting the local band of bellringers where one exists, their involvement in the transition and subsequent access to the bells will be invaluable.



Church Closure Project

Church status categories

The Guild will aim to maintain a register of the ownership status of all the churches within the diocese where there are bells hung for change ringing. The register will be updated at least annually and be available on the Guild website. The Guild will aim to update the guidance notes relating to a change in status of a church with bells, as is required.

Functioning and Festival churches

The benchmark for a church to be considered a functioning place of worship is that at least **6** services are held per annum. The PCC remains responsible for the building & faculty applications, where there isn't a functioning PCC then the incumbent is the responsible person.

Closed churches

The decision to finally close a church (after the requisite consultation process has concluded) lies with the Church Commission. At this stage, the responsibility for the building passes to the Diocese Board of Finance. In all cases a suitable alternative use for the building will be investigated. Any bellringing at a closed church will need the permission of the Diocese Pastoral Secretary, currently Sarah Girling (s.girling@hereford.anglican.org). This person will be aware of the building condition and the insurance status. We as bellringers may need to conduct an inspection to ascertain that the bells are in a suitable state of repair to be rung safely, without the potential to cause damage to the building structure or the bellringers. Permission to hold a service at a closed church e.g. a bellringer's service requires the permission of the incumbent and the Bishop.

Where a closed church is due to pass into private ownership the bells are classified as building contents. As such, decisions as to their future fall under the category of "Bishop's directions" and a faculty is not required to remove them. The decision about contents (including bells) will be made at the conclusion of the sale and their removal could be made a condition of sale. Planning for the future of bells should begin when a preferred bidder is identified.



Church Closure Project

Church status categories

Alternative preservation organisations

Churches which are no longer functioning as places of religious worship may pass into the custody of third-party organisations such as the Churches Conservation trust or Friends of friendless churches. These churches are required to be open for a prescriptive number of hours each day and a local point of contact for the organisation should be identified.

An HDGB designated contact should be appointed for these locations who can liaise with the relevant church authority to grant permission for the bells to be rung.

The designated contact should:

- ensure they are listed as the tower contact on the HDGB website
- ensure they are aware of the public liability insurance status of the building
- be aware and communicate any local or ownership restrictions in place at the location
- be aware of the state of the bells & ropes and advise potential visitors accordingly – this advice could extend to a request that the visiting band make their own arrangements to inspect the condition of the bells and ropes prior to them ringing.
- be able to make access arrangements for visiting ringers ensuring that any special instructions are communicated e.g. clock chimes, window openings, heaters, fans, bells up, bells to be left up/down



Church Closure Project

Ringling at Conservation trust churches, Friends of the friendless churches

Guild events:

- The organiser must liaise with the tower contact to verify that the bells are in a safe condition to be rung
- Where the status of the bells cannot be established an inspection should be arranged.
- Ensure PL insurance is in place
- Ensure any special instructions are followed. Towers without bands will not have up to date notices displayed
- Respect any local or third-party restrictions

Refer to the document - Risk Assessment – Tower/District/Guild Event on the HDGB policies section of the website.

All other ringing:

- Visiting ringers do so at their own risk
- The organiser must liaise with the tower contact to verify that the bells are in a safe condition to be rung
- Where the status of the bells cannot be established an inspection should be arranged.
- Ensure PL insurance is in place
- Ensure any special instructions are followed. Towers without bands will not have up to date notices displayed
- Respect any local or third-party restrictions



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What to do if my church is preparing for a change in status?

1. Email the Guild secretary guild_secretary@HDGB.org in order that the status of the church can be amended on the Guild register
2. Email the BRF gstapp@gmail.com
3. Appoint a spokesperson for the bellringers who will be the point of contact for all interested parties.
4. Carry out an inventory of bell related items on the premises, particularly those in the belfry and the bell chamber for example:
 - Bells
 - Handbells
 - Literature
 - Furniture
 - Maintenance tools
 - Pictures/photos/peal boards
 - Spare ropes, stays etc
4. Return any personal property to the owner(s) where possible and make provision for the preservation, including possible re-homing, of the inventory items.



Church Closure Project

Churches passing into Third party ownership

A church may be sold to a private or commercial enterprise where the intended change of use of the building means that continued access to the bells will stop at a given point in the future. Where a closed church is due to pass into private ownership the bells are classified as building contents. As such, decisions as to their future fall under the category of “Bishop’s directions” and a faculty is not required to remove them. The decision about contents (including bells) will be made at the conclusion of the sale and their removal could be made a condition of sale. Planning for the future of bells should begin when a preferred bidder is identified.

Clearly such a project requires careful initial consideration and, if the decision is made to try and retain the bells within the Guild, careful management & implementation of the actions required to ensure they are achieved within the timeframe specified by the new owners. Whilst the guild will always aim to support projects relating to the future of bells within the diocese it cannot take complete responsibility.

A working party from within the relevant district should be formed with a project manager clearly identified. The party should include all the relevant expertise e.g. local ringers, the belfries officer, clerical representative, BRF representative, external bell hanging expertise and organisations such as the Keltek Trust (this list is intended as a guide and is not exhaustive)

Whilst a faculty is not required to remove the bells, consideration is needed as to the subsequent storage location or the destination for said bells. A faculty may be required at the receiving location should this be in another church within the guild.



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Looking after bellringers affected by a change in status at their local tower

Ringers are very understandably emotionally invested in their towers, and the prospect of a church closure can be very upsetting.

District officers and neighbouring towers should look to provide support and offer alternative locations where the ringers would be made welcome. Retention of ringers is very important factor in creating a richer ringing experience for our members.

Ringers at a church facing closure should not feel under pressure to assume responsibility for the future access to, or voluntary maintenance of the bells.