



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.

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.

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

Each Diocese 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 Association or Guild, will have their interests at heart and can be approached for advice, although his/her role is actually to advise the DAC rather than ringers generally. The DAC has two main responsibilities. The first is to advise the Diocesan Chancellor on the granting of faculties; the second is to advise 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. In relation to bells this will mean all installations of bells, frames and fittings and also tower work. Faculties are granted by the Chancellor of the Diocese and not the DAC but if there is any doubt as to whether a faculty is needed the DAC secretary should be consulted.

The first step for bellringers is to consult their PCC and incumbent and get their approval for any proposed work. The PCC will then apply for the faculty.

For some minor repairs and maintenance the de minimis rule applies as the work would be considered to be too small to require a faculty. Each diocese interprets this differently so it does need to be checked with the appropriate DAC and this is where the Bell Adviser can be of great help. Routine maintenance of bells, ropes and fittings would usually be covered by this rule but not repairs or alterations.

Church law requires that permission for all ringing has to be sought from and granted by the minister. It is not up to the ringers to decide whether they or visitors can ring the bells.

The law relating to the noise church bells make and whether that constitutes a nuisance is a Statutory and Common law, not a Church law. The Central Council has someone whose responsibility is to liaise with those towers who have problems with complaints about noise. Contact the Tower Stewardship Committee for further information.

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, Child Protection, Data Protection and Discrimination. Please refer to other Guidance Notes in this series for additional detail.

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:

www.cccbr.org.uk/towerstewardship