

## **Getting our bells back ringing again – March 2021**

Following the last committee meeting and to satisfy some individual requests for guidance, I have prepared some notes regarding checking your bells before starting regular ringing. I have put this together after discussing the matter with a number of different experienced ringers and bell engineers. One problem is that things are changing regularly. I suggest going to various online sites for the latest information. That said, I will try and give some guidance that is fairly flexible and hopefully covers most situations. Some of this will depend on the experience / knowledge of anyone in the band to carry this out. It should be emphasised that nobody should put themselves in danger with a view to making things safe!

The most basic but important procedure will be to visually inspect everything related to the bell installation, including the ringing chamber, intermediate chambers and of course, the bell chamber itself. Given that builders may have been given some access, ensure that nothing has been left that might impede the swing of any of the bells. There was an instance some years ago where builders had draped a polythene cover over a bell that was up and secured it by nailing it to the stay! I would just add, this was up North and not in Kent. Material installed for soundproofing in louvres has been known to come away.

Having established everything is clear, the next stage will depend on the competence of the ringers as to how far they can go. I suggest that the bells are rung up one at a time by an experienced ringer who will know if the bell feels OK. This should reduce the need for anyone to be at bell level to watch the bell going up. There will be many towers where this could not be done safely anyway. Should anyone decide this must be done, I suggest each bell is rung up and rung down so that the person at bell level does not end up amongst a lot of raised bells. A simple signal to downstairs is for the person upstairs to hold one of the bell ropes and simply jump it up and down to signal for the bell to be lowered quickly.

This may also be a good time for a bit of routine maintenance to be carried out at the same time as this will establish that all is well. If you have a maintenance contract and your contractor can do their visit prior to your first ringing, then this should take care of most of the above.

There have been comments about the bells sitting in one position. Currently, we are not allowed in the tower and gently moving the bell will not move the bearing to a new position. This is more serious for high-speed bearings. Do not be tempted to force lots of grease into ball bearings. Plain bearings will probably need some lubrication.

Check your tower risk assessment (which may be your own or part of the church one). Is the emergency lighting functioning? If you haven't got any, you should have.

Consider also, if you are an upstairs ringing chamber, is there any form of fire alarm from downstairs? We had a false alarm when they decided to light the incense burner in the tower vestry, but it proved it was working.

If you want help with any of this, please get in touch. While I can't visit every tower, I can hopefully give some guidance or suggest someone from another tower who you can call upon to give assistance.

Brian Butcher - Bell Restoration Officer for and on behalf of KCACR.