



THE KENT COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF CHANGE RINGERS MINUTES OF THE EXTRA-ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING



Easter Monday, 21st April 2025 at St Nicholas, Rectory
Lane, Sevenoaks TN13 1JA
4:15pm

- 1. Welcome and introduction by the Chairman** - Neil Jones welcomed 45 members to the meeting, and explained that the General Committee had been trying to change the objects for the BRF for some time, to omit reference to the 'Christian religion' in Rule 2 of the BRF.

However, the online system used by the Charities Commission, coupled with the fact that it has proved almost impossible to discuss our previously proposed objects with a representative from the Commission has resulted in this process becoming very long-winded. We finally heard back from the Commission in late 2024 that our current application to change the objects of the BRF had been rejected.

The General Committee have investigated the wording used by other guilds and associations in their BRF rules and have identified at least two other ringing associations whose wording omits this phrase in favour of references to education and wellbeing, both of which are recognised by the Commission as valid criteria for a charity. These associations do have charitable status based on these objects.

This EGM, with the proposed changes to the wording of Rule 2, had been communicated to the membership.

NJ added that the KCACR does have the option of employing a solicitor, or availing itself of 30 minutes of pro bono advice from The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO). He reiterated that the process of having changes to the BRF objects approved or rejected by the Charities Commission is a protracted one.

- 2. Apologies for Absence** – Stuart Palin, Tim Wraight, Diana Wraight, Jackie Barlow, Margaret Funnell, Gill Rapley, Chris Rapley, Donald Holden, Rosemary Holden, Val Cooper, Ellen Jones, Stan Jenner, Ann Jenner, Florence Hamp, Margaret Leadbeater, Graham Cuthbert, Philippa Rooke.

- 3. General Committee Proposal to amend** the wording of Rule 2 of the Bell Restoration Fund Rules.

NJ highlighted the current and proposed wording:

3.1 Current wording

Rule 2:

2) The object of the fund shall be to advance the Christian religion by providing financial assistance to churches in the county of Kent or that part of London formerly in the county of Kent for the purpose of maintaining and improving their bell installations by the making of grants from the fund.

3.2 Reasoning for the changes

The reason for the change is that some organisations and companies are no longer able to sponsor or support projects that are supporting religious activities. There has

recently been a successful bell restoration project which lost a potential donor because of rule 2. Whilst bells are rung for church services, one can argue that the activities of the Association are not actually religious, rather that we are supporting the church through ringing bells. It is therefore proposed that the wording of Rule 2 in the Bell Restoration Fund Rules is changed so that it no longer includes the phrase 'advance the Christian religion'.

In addition to the churches that fall within the boundaries of the Association, there are some rings of bells that are housed in redundant churches, such as St Alphege in Canterbury, and there are also some secular rings of bells, notably the Waterloo Tower at Quex Park. With the likelihood that more churches are going to close in the future, we feel that it would be prudent to include the term 'towers' as well as 'churches' within the definitions of what the BRF can support. Consequently, we would like to add 'towers' to Rule 2.

3.3 Proposed changes to Rule 2:

2) The object of the fund shall be to advance the art of bellringing by providing financial assistance to churches and bell towers in the County of Kent or that part of London formerly in the County of Kent for the purposes of maintaining and improving their bell installations in order that the churches and belltowers can provide facilities for furthering the public education in bellringing and for the benefit of the welfare of people by improving their condition of life through mental and physical exercise.

- 3.4 a) Alternative wording was proposed by Isobel Legg (IL), which was shared with the members present:

The object of the fund shall be to advance the traditional art of bellringing by providing financial assistance to churches and bell towers in the county of Kent, or that part of London formerly in the county of Kent, for the purposes of maintaining and improving their bell installations for public benefit, promoting community cohesion and enhancing cultural life by enabling communities to mark local, national or religious occasions in a time-honoured way, and facilitating healthy recreation for multi-generational groups.

- b) Chairman NJ reminded members present that the BRF Rules don't require any proposed changes to be shared with the membership before the EGM, so IL's suggested wording could be considered.
- c) IL asked to say a few words; she stated that while she is in agreement with the General Committee that the BRF Rule 2 needs updating, she felt that Rule 2 gets right to the heart of why we want bells and ringing to keep going – the link to religion, and promoting the Christian faith.
- d) IL further stated her view that it is not illegal to say the KCACR has a religious purpose, but that it would be illegal to say we don't have a religious purpose as an Association, if indeed we do. She added that it would be fraudulent to not include 'religious' or 'religion' in our BRF rules. She went on to argue that if we remove the term 'religious', then the inference would be that only secular towers get money.
- e) This led to some discussion by the members present, with some objections to the suggestion that the General Committee was proposing to misrepresent the purpose of the BRF and the KCACR.

- f) James Davis asked to speak and shared that as someone who is not religious, he – like many others he rings with – does not see his bellringing as anything to do with the church or the Christian faith, and as such felt that the KCACR does not have this ‘religious purpose’ IL was referencing.
- g) Membership Secretary, Webmaster, Handbook Editor and Maidstone District Rep Doug Davis (DD) countered that the reason for the change is so that the Association is not restricted by the link to religion, when it comes to seeking charitable donations.
- h) Peal Secretary Phil Barnes (PB) stated that the premise of the argument to remove reference to ‘religious’ or ‘the Christian religion’ is flawed, since it would be highly unlikely for any donating organisation that might donate to bellringing, not to realise there is at least some religious connection between bellringing and the Christian church, particularly since most rings of bells are found in churches. He was in favour of the removal of the word ‘religious’.
- i) Caroline Stockman (CS) spoke in support of PB. Drawing from her extensive experience as a Non-Executive Director for a variety of organisations (including some not-for-profit), former Chief Executive of the Association of Corporate Treasurers, and her 30 years’ experience in senior finance, commercial and strategic posts at organisations and businesses, she shared that corporate donors don’t want to support political or religious causes.
- j) CS went on to say that it’s not that the KCACR would be falsifying its purpose by omitting religion from Rule 2, but by including it, it puts a blocker on funding, even if corporate donors are supportive in spirit.
- k) James Davis also spoke in support of PB. He said that for him, bellringing is about local cultural life, and being part of a national tradition that’s been going on for centuries.
- l) IL argued that the BRF is for the upkeep of bells, and since bells are in churches, their purpose is religious – a statement which many members disagreed with. IL further stated her belief that the KCACR would be defrauding donors if we don’t mention the religious purpose, which again drew much disagreement.
- m) Canterbury Rep Malcolm Barden (MB_C) stated that the idea that bellringing is for advancing the Christian religion is not accurate.
- n) CCCBR Rep Chris Bassett proposed:

The object of the fund shall be to advance the traditional art of bellringing by providing financial assistance to churches and bell towers bell installations in the county of Kent, or that part of London formerly in the county of Kent, for the purposes of maintaining and improving their bell installations for public benefit, promoting community cohesion and enhancing cultural life by enabling communities to mark local, national or religious occasions in a time-honoured way, and facilitating healthy recreation for multi-generational groups.

- o) CS said ‘religious occasions’ would not be OK for donors. Marilyn Barden (MB) suggested replacing religion with ‘other important’:

The object of the fund shall be to advance the traditional art of bellringing by providing financial assistance to bell installations in the county of Kent, or that

part of London formerly in the county of Kent, for the purposes of maintaining and improving their bell installations for public benefit, promoting community cohesion and enhancing cultural life by enabling communities to mark local, national or **other occasions** in a time-honoured way, and facilitating healthy recreation for multi-generational groups.

- p) Treasurer Peter Joyce (PJ) suggested we use a solicitor, and ask whether the KCACR would be misleading potential donors if we remove 'religious', get their professional legal advice.
- q) MB_C asked CS for her perspective on whether the use of the word 'church' would be problematic for corporate donors, which CS confirmed it would be. CS added that the word 'traditional' is also not seen as inclusive.
- r) It was felt by members that reference to 'mental and physical' health and recreation was important:

The object of the fund shall be to advance the **traditional art of bellringing by providing financial assistance to bell installations in the county of Kent, or that part of London formerly in the county of Kent, for the purposes of maintaining and improving their bell installations for public benefit, promoting community cohesion and enhancing cultural life by enabling communities to mark local, national or other occasions in a time-honoured way, and facilitating healthy **mental and physical recreation** for multi-generational groups.**

- s) PJ further highlighted that in other parts of the BRF Rules, our affiliation to the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers is made clear – thus we are not hiding the fact we have a religious purpose too.
- t) A further adjustment to the wording was made to remove repetition of 'bell installations':

The object of the fund shall be to advance the art of bellringing by providing financial assistance for bell installations in the county of Kent, or that part of London formerly in the county of Kent, for the purposes of maintaining and improving **their bell these installations for public benefit, promoting community cohesion and enhancing cultural life by enabling communities to mark local, national or other occasions in a time-honoured way, and facilitating healthy mental and physical recreation for multi-generational groups.**

- u) Chairman NJ proposed we provisionally accept this new wording, on proviso that once PJ has submitted it to The National Council for Voluntary Organisations, and once they confirm that they are satisfied it will not mislead donors, and if they think it is likely to be accepted by the Charities Commission, the KCACR would then use this wording for Rule 2 of the BRF:

The object of the fund shall be to advance the art of bellringing by providing financial assistance for bell installations in the county of Kent, or that part of London formerly in the county of Kent, for the purposes of maintaining and improving these installations for public benefit, promoting community cohesion and enhancing cultural life by enabling communities to mark local, national or other occasions in a time-honoured way, and facilitating healthy mental and physical recreation for multi-generational groups.

- v) Ben Legg (BL) and DD seconded this proposal.

w) A majority of the members present voted in favour, with none against and 3 abstentions.

The meeting was declared closed at 5pm.

SIGNED by the Chairman as a true record as adopted by members at the AGM 2026:

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Chairman