



The Peterborough Diocesan Guild of
Church Bellringers
(Founded 1924)



Safety Guidelines for Stewards When Inspecting Towers

Introduction

As part of the role of steward you will be required from time to time to visit and inspect towers and their bell installations. When carrying out such work, your safety should always take the highest priority; therefore it is important to ensure that any possible risks are identified when making any such visit.

Below are some guidelines detailing different aspects that should be considered when starting and during an inspection. These can be broken down in to different areas, which are detailed below. Each installation is different and there may be other elements you will come across, therefore please do not consider this list as exhaustive.

If anything gives you concern, details of these should be noted and fed back to the church authorities as areas for possible improvement.

Finally, the overall guidance to follow is:

If you do not feel safe with what you are about to do, then don't do it!

Insurance

If you are undertaking an inspection or minor work in your role as Steward and on behalf of the Guild, you will be covered by the Guild's insurance.

Minor work would involve changing a rope or replacing a stay. If you are involved with larger work, such as a full bell restoration, insurance cover must be sought elsewhere as you will not be covered by the Guild for this.

Preparing for an Inspection

Questions to ask before Entering the Tower

Before entering the tower, speak with the church authorities to see if there are any issues you should be aware of. This should cover the condition of floors, ladders and access hatches.



If you are not comfortable with any information you receive, then do not enter the tower.

Make sure any clock hammers are dis-engaged, so you don't get any sudden shocks, and most importantly **make sure all bells are down**. Don't take someone's word for it, check yourself!

Avoid Lone Working

Working alone in a tower should be avoided. If the tower has a person who could be with you during the inspection, or your branch has an assistant steward who can accompany you, this should always be done. Ensure you know the post code of the church you are visiting as this information will be required by emergency services should they be required.

Alternatively, the steward from a neighbouring branch may be willing to assist. If you cannot find a local person, please contact the Guild Steward.

Protecting Yourself

When visiting a tower, always ensure that you are suitably dressed for the work that is going to be undertaken. This should include:

- **Suitable footwear** – safety boots or shoes should be worn if available
- **Overalls** – While these will protect your clothing, they will also help hold any area of loose clothing out of the way.
- **Gloves** – May not be necessary all the time, but if work, such as replacing a stay is to be undertaken hand protection is advised.
- **Goggles/safety glasses** – These should be worn if dust is going to be generated, but are advisable to be worn at other times.
- **Torch** – Some form of portable lighting, be this a head torch or hand torch.
- **Face masks** – These should be worn particularly if a tower is dusty or has any form of bird infestation.
- **Head Protection** – If you are working in confined spaces, some form of head protection should be worn.

Tools and Cables

If you are going to be taking tools up the tower with you, ensure that you are not overloaded and you can manage any access easily, with both hands free. Using a rucksack to carry the tools may be one solution, but if necessary make more one than one trip.

If it is necessary to run extension leads to get power to where you are working, ensure these are in good condition and the flex is routed where you cannot get entangled in the lead, especially if working at height on a bell frame, for instance.

To prevent leads being run if possible use battery powered tools, or a manual tool, an example is to use a manual plane instead of an electric one if you are shaping a new stay to size.



If you feel power being permanently available in the tower would be beneficial, this should be pointed out to the church authorities as an area of possible improvement.

Communications

Always let someone know where you are and how long you expect to be away. Have a charged mobile phone with you and let people know you have it and the number.

If you have access to a set of walkie-talkies, then these could be useful for maintain contact between yourself and helpers.

Gaining Access

Padlocks and Keys

If a key is required to gain access, ensure you or the person working with you has possession of this during your visit, this will ensure you are not locked in! If the door is locked via a padlock, take this with you as this will again prevent you being accidentally being locked in.



In the event that there is no security on the tower access and you feel this would be beneficial, this should be pointed out to the church authorities as an area of possible improvement.

Fixed Ladders

Issues with fixed ladders should not be encountered, as these should be inspected as part of the quinquennial inspection. However, it is always worth checking that the ladder is still secure. If the ladder is made of wood, ensure that there is no excessive decay from woodworm or rot to make the ladder unsafe. Check the rungs are also secure and not cracked or damaged. If the ladder has some form of handrail, this should also be checked.



Any issues with the condition of the ladder should be reported to the church authorities.



If you feel that the ladder is not safe to climb, you should not do so!

Moveable Ladders

Moveable ladders are generally not inspected as part of quinquennial inspection, so their condition may not be checked so regularly. If the ladder is made of wood, ensure that there is no excessive decay from woodworm or rot as to make the ladder unsafe.



Any issues with the condition of the ladder should be reported to the church authorities.



If the ladder can be fixed in place, this should be pointed out to the church authorities as an area of possible improvement.



If you feel that the ladder is not safe to climb, you should not do so!

Stair cases

Most stair cases encountered will be spiral. The condition of the treads should be checked for steepness and un-evenness. It is preferable to have some sort of hand rail, be this fixed to the outer wall or a rope down the central column of the stair case.



If nothing is available, this should be pointed out to the church authorities as an area of improvement

Lighting

If lighting is provided in the tower, it should be ensured all luminaires are functioning correctly. If the switch for these is downstairs, ensure that people know not to switch it if you are working in the tower. This can be done verbally, or by fixing a notice to the switch indicating that someone is present in the tower. If the lighting is not sufficient, a torch or portable lighting should be used to enhance the lighting available.



If any lights are not working, this should be raised with the church authorities.



If the lighting provided is not adequate to carry out tasks safely, this should be raised with the church authorities as an area of improvement.

Trap Doors

Trap doors should be checked for condition, especially if they need to be stood upon when closed. If they cannot be opened with ease, it is worth seeing if some sort of counterbalance could be used to assist with this, or if the hinges are in good condition.

When entering a trap door via a ladder, it is good practice to extend the ladder 1.5m above the trap door giving additional grab handles as the chamber is entered.



If there are no form of grab handles extending 1.5m above the trap door, this idea should be suggested to the church authorities as an area of possible improvement.

Working in the bells

If you are climbing up in to a bell frame, ask yourself if you can get out easily. Sometimes it is easier to get in to a place than it is to get out.

If there is a floor just below the bell frame, make sure this is safe to stand on before you do. An inspection and question to the local contact will hopefully answer your question.

When you are working among the bells, plan your movements around the frame before you move. Make sure there are sufficient hand hold points to steady yourself as you move.

Also, be careful where you place your feet, check if clock hammers and clock wire could present a possible trip hazard.

The shortest route may not be the safest one, so plan your route carefully.

If you need to make changes to an object, such as a stay, make sure you feel safe in the position you are to work safely. If necessary bring the item all the way down the tower and work on it.

In the event that there is a bird problem in the tower, be careful as their droppings can present a slip hazard. Try and identify their route(s) of access and feed this back to the church authorities.



If any issues are identified with any floors, or any other parts of the installation, such as bird infestation, this should be fed back to the church authorities.

Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the following sources:

CCCBR Website Tower Stewardship area - <http://www.cccbr.org.uk/towerstewardship/>

Ringling Info Maintenance Section - <http://www.ringing.info/index.html>

The Bell Maintenance section of the Guild website: <http://www.pdg.btck.co.uk/BellMaintenance>

Why masks should be worn in bird infestations: <http://www.pigeon-lung.co.uk/index.php>