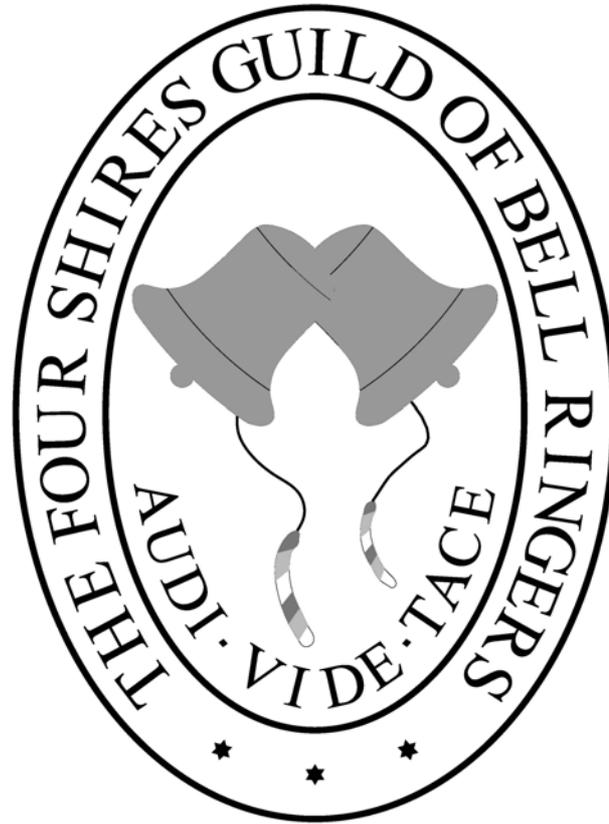


THE FOUR SHIRES GUILD OF BELL RINGERS



HEALTH & SAFETY POLICY

Rev:	Date:	Revised by:	Agreed by Com'tee	Changes:
0	Feb 2009	C M Povey	Jan 2009	Initial agreed document
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FOUR SHIRES GUILD OF BELL RINGERS

HEALTH & SAFETY POLICY

This policy (Revision 1) was agreed for Guild use by its Committee on December 3rd, 2009.

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1 INTRODUCTION:

The Four Shires Guild (hereafter 'the Guild') is a church bell ringing organisation. Its principal function is the ringing of church bells in the English full-circle fashion. Its area of operation is within roughly a 15 mile radius of the historical point at which the counties of Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Oxfordshire and Warwickshire met (now Glos, Warks and Oxon), but occasionally it operates outside this area.

The Guild does not own any bells or tower and it is therefore entirely dependent on permission given by the owners to allow its activities to occur. The owner is almost always the Church of England, whose powers of control are delegated to the individual Parochial Church Councils (PCCs). Other owners exist, eg the Churches Conservation Trust.

The Guild has a responsibility to ensure its activities operate safely and without injury as far as possible. This is complicated by not being in control of the premises on which it operates, and the fact that the ancient buildings it frequents are in most cases incapable of complying with modern H&S standards, even if their owners were pro-active in ensuring compliance.

As the Guild always operates on the property of others, a set of rules and procedures is required to reduce the risk of damage and accidents to third parties, whether this is the owner's property or people working for the owners. (The Health & Safety Act regards a church building as a workplace, and therefore all workers, paid or voluntary, are included in the Act.) This policy forms an integral part of the Third Party Liability insurance the Guild holds, and the procedures, recommendations and information it contains must be followed to ensure risks are minimised within acceptable limits.

This policy is a 'live' document, in that it is under constant review by the Guild's Committee and its content is therefore liable to change.

The Guild appoints one of its members to be its Health & Safety Officer, to oversee the policy, to monitor the Guild's activities generally and to offer advice where possible. The current H&S Officer is:-

Christopher M Povey - appointed by the Committee on 11th December 2008

2 ASPECTS CONCERNING PRINCIPAL ACTIVITIES

The main activity is organising ringing at various churches. Various aspects are related to arranging and running this activity:-

Seeking permission to ring. Permission should be obtained in writing from the PCC, Vicar, Churchwarden or designated tower representative. This provides clear confirmation that the PCC accepts the Guild on its Third Party Liability insurance for claims that may be due to PCC causes. The person seeking permission should ask whether a local person will meet the Guild, to unlock and turn off clock hammers, etc. If a local person is unable to do this, the request for permission should ask for details of the procedures that are needed to make the bells safe for ringing, the state to leave the bells in at the end of the practice, for securing the church afterwards and for returning the keys.

Known tower hazards. Most towers have some hazards. Most of these hazards are minor. Most tower hazards within the Guild's area of operation are known. Some of these hazards are significant (eg, worn or irregular steps, inadequate lighting in the dark, vertical access ladders) and a brief note of known significant hazards should be appended to those towers to which they refer in the list of practices, so that ringers wishing to attend may be warned adequately beforehand. (The overall responsibility for these hazards is the PCC. However, if such hazards are known by the Guild, it is the Guild's responsibility to warn of such for its functions.)

Where permission to ring at towers outside the Guild's area is being sought, eg for a ringing tour, information about hazards should be requested of the tower correspondent.

'Designated Person'. Before the practice takes place, a suitably-experienced Guild member should be chosen to take overall charge of all aspects of the practice. This person will be the Designated Person for the event. In most cases this will be the person controlling the ringing, but this is not essential.

At the ringing practice. Before ringing starts, the Designated Person should check the bells are fully safe to be rung (clock hammers, etc – even locals can forget sometimes) and whether the bells are 'up' or 'down'. A quick check on the condition of ropes may be sensible, particularly if some are in a poor state, and such condition noted before starting.

The ringing should proceed in a fashion that is considered 'generally acceptable in normal ringing circles'. Learners (see below) should be adequately supervised. Ringers should ring up to the weight of bell that is reasonable for them, and should be encouraged onto more-acceptable weights if they exceed their capabilities. Small ringing chambers exist and can lead to overcrowding, which may be dangerous if this results in insufficient room to ring safely, and such conditions should be monitored and action taken if warranted.

While the maintenance of the bells is wholly a PCC responsibility, any obvious defects should be reported to the local representative or the PCC for them to investigate further if they wish (but see later regarding giving advice).

The bells should be left in the same state as they were found, unless the local representative or the PCC requests something different. If rope tails have been adjusted, these should be returned to the original position. No bells should ever be left 'up', unless found in that state, or if specifically requested to do so by the local representative or PCC.

Inexperienced ringers. The Guild has no direct responsibility for teaching people to ring from 'scratch', as this function is normally undertaken as part of an individual tower's activities and under the cover of the relevant PCC. However, learners in the early stages of handling a bell are likely to be brought to the Guild's practices for extra ringing experience. Normally these ringers will be brought by their tutors, in which case they are deemed to be under the tutor's control for any ringing and remain the tutor's direct responsibility at all times during the practice. In cases where the learner arrives without their tutor, then the Designated Person in charge of the practice must assume full responsibility if the learner wishes to ring, and assess, or arrange for assessment of, the person's capabilities to allow adequate supervision to be given. The Designated Person has full control over the ringing, and if a tutor's actions and methods are considered unacceptable, then the Designated Person must take relevant action to ensure such is amended or stopped.

Unacceptable behaviour. Unacceptable behaviour by Guild members should be very rare. If in the opinion of the Designated Person such behaviour occurs, then the member(s) should be asked to moderate the behaviour. If this request is refused, or the unacceptable behaviour continues despite assurances to comply, then the Designated Person should ask the member(s) to leave the practice. The Designated Person should report any instances of unacceptable behaviour to the Guild Master or Secretary, particularly where members (or visitors: see below) are asked to leave. These instances should be reported at the next Committee meeting, where they should be discussed to determine whether there are insurance consequences or otherwise.

Visitors. The Guild welcomes visiting ringers (ie non-members) to its practices, particularly from the tower being visited. In this case, the visitors will be subject to the Guild's relevant rules and H&S policy, particularly regarding behaviour, as their acceptance by the Guild to a ringing practice may deem their actions covered by the Guild's Public Liability insurance during their attendance. Any visitors refusing to comply with the Guild's rules shall be asked by the Designated Person to leave the ringing practice.

Injuries and accidents. Bell-ringing has a very large potential to be physically damaging to people and objects. Damage can occur through poor or inexperienced handling, inappropriate behaviour, or a failure of the bell equipment. Although bell-ringing has a good accident record overall, this may be attributed in large measure to how well ringing practices are managed. Good management can minimise the risk of injuries and accidents to an acceptable level. The great majority of injuries seem to be very minor, eg blisters and abrasions. A first aid box should ideally be available at each ringing practice, to deal only with very minor incidents. Should a larger injury occur, it is essential it is dealt with by fully-qualified people, eg the medical profession. In such cases, and where appropriate, the Designated Person should arrange for qualified people to be called, or, where appropriate, for the injured person to be transported to treatment. Injuries and accidents should be recorded in an Accident Book, which may accompany the First Aid box, or be kept with the Secretary. In the latter case, the Designated Person should report the incident to the Secretary at the earliest opportunity.

Safety (Emergency) Lighting. Sudden failure of lights during ringing can lead to panic, missed sallies and flailing ropes, with potentially dire consequences. Some towers have emergency lights installed, which illuminate when power fails. Many do not. Candles have been used in the past for emergency lighting, lit to burn throughout the ringing, but they are a fire hazard and should no longer be used. Electric powered emergency lights are now available. If circumstances are deemed appropriate, an emergency light should be available at a practice.

Fire prevention. To minimise the risk of fire, nothing involving naked flames shall be brought into or near any churches and their associated buildings. Guild members should ensure visitors comply with this.

As public buildings, the law banning smoking in churches and associated buildings applies. Guild members should comply with this law in all circumstances.

3 NON-SPECIFIC ASPECTS

Child Protection Policy. The Guild has its own Child Protection Policy and adherence to its guidelines at all times is essential.

Bell maintenance and advice. The Guild has no responsibility for the maintenance of any ring of bells. This is the responsibility of the owners. No Guild member should undertake bell maintenance or similar work to bells on the Guild's behalf, as no insurance cover is in place to cover failures, damage to equipment and accidents.

Similarly, no specific advice should be given on what might be wrong with a bell and the measures that might be necessary to put something right, beyond mentioning to the local representative or PCC that it may be worth having 'such-and-such' of a bell checked, because that aspect feels unusual. An indication of the degree of the perceived problem being unusual may be acceptable. PCCs are able to contact the Diocesan Bell Advisers about a problem, and the 'county' association/society/guilds, which have bell advisers.

Ecclesiastical Insurance Group Guidance Notes. EIG publish Guidance Notes for PCCs on a wide range of activities a church might host. Some of these are bell-related. The Guild should be mindful of these recommendations, as there is a 97% chance the church is insured with EIG (97% of churches are EIG-insured).

Where applicable and appropriate, the EIG bell-related recommendations are deemed to be part of this policy.

EIG's Notes are available in hard-copy form from EIG or may be downloaded via their web-site (www.ecclesiastical.com).

Unusual hazards and assessing their risk. Accepted techniques are available for assessing the severity of a risk, and various methods for eliminating or minimizing the risk can usually be applied. The Guild's Health & Safety Officer is available to inspect and assess any specific risk that might affect the Guild's operation and can offer advice on measures to deal with such aspects.