

## **Review of The Guild of Devonshire Ringers**

### **Report from group C - Bell Restoration & Tower Maintenance**

An initial meeting of the above group was held on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2008 attended by Ian Campbell, James Clarke and Ian Smith. Apologies were received from John Foster but he sent a paper outlining a number of relevant issues which were considered. James Clarke took the chair and Ian Campbell agreed to act as scribe. A follow-up meeting was held on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2008 with all present. This paper is the outcome of those discussions.

The primary work that can be done by the Guild to assist with Bell Restoration and Tower Maintenance was seen as falling into three main categories:

1. Providing advice to towers planning work (both restoration and maintenance) at the technical level and also regarding fundraising and the availability of grants from various sources.
2. Informing towers about the importance of regular maintenance work, and what work needs to be done. The production of a maintenance handbook for each tower which outlined the specific schedules needed and a record of work done would be a specific deliverable which would enhance the view of the Guild by the affiliated towers and would, hopefully, encourage more regular (and possibly better) maintenance to be undertaken.
3. To provide a nucleus of people who are able to help with maintenance and restoration schemes, and to work under a bell-hanger where appropriate in order to reduce overall costs of such work.

Much discussion was had on this last point. In order to function efficiently such a team of helpers would need to define the type of work that they could undertake without involving a professional bell-hanger and to understand their limitations. The thorny problem of appropriate insurance was raised, as was the possible requirement of an instruction course for new helpers. Ian agreed to contact the Essex and Kent Associations, who are known to provide such a service to their towers. The outcomes of these discussions are appended below.

Regarding the first point (advice to towers) it was pointed out that this advice could include items such as sound proofing and lighting, and that the Guild members should always be on the lookout for new schemes at towers which were not already known, either those which could take new rings of bells or where an unringable peal already exists.

The DAC advisory position was also mentioned. In some circumstances there could be a conflict of interest if the DAC advisor was not independent of the Guild.

Further discussions looked at some other questions, including the reasons for restoring or augmenting rings of bells when there are insufficient ringers to ring them. The feeling was that such work usually involves a number of people who are not ringers, and so helps to publicise the art and also frequently stimulates recruitment of ringers. However it would be appropriate for the Guild to be involved in the training and education of new ringers at a tower with new, augmented, or even restored bells.

Some discussion was had regarding the preservation of historical items. The overwhelming feeling was that bells should always be as easy as possible to ring, and that preservation should not inhibit this if at all possible. Bells that are easy to ring encourage good striking, simplify teaching, and encourage ringers to continue with their ringing. This is consistent with the aim of the Guild – the furtherance of change ringing.

Fundraising was mentioned but the money raised by the Guild is passed to the Devon Church Bells Restoration Fund (DCBRF) which is a joint project between the Guild and the Devon Association so is not considered to be a part of the remit of this group.

Ian Campbell 14/10/2008

## **Appendix 1**

### ***Notes from telephone conversation between Ian Campbell and Adrian Semken, Essex Association, 14/9/08***

The Essex Association maintenance team has no real structure – it was thought that a formal structure could actually make things more difficult and could be over restrictive. However the Association has a post of “Honorary Technical Advisor” – this post has no remit for any conservation aspects. The DAC is completely separate although the current incumbent does also serve on the committee that decides on how grants are to be awarded (equivalent to our DCBRF).

Basic insurance is provided by the standard Association scheme (we do not have one in Devon!) but when working on larger projects insurance is arranged through the parish for which that work is being done. This covers personal accident payments and, presumably, anything that might result from claims by a third party. Concerns were raised regarding a reduction in payouts on the policy for accidents involving those aged over 65. This is not insignificant as many people working on such a team are likely to be retired. As a direct result of this Adrian Semken will be resigning as technical advisor next year when he reaches 65.

Regarding maintenance, the intention is to teach incumbent ringers to do their own maintenance. To this effect demonstrations and tuition are offered to local ringers on request.

The Association owns some equipment, including lifting tackle, but is now thinking that it is better if relevant items are hired when needed. This avoids any problems of obtaining test certificates and keeping them up to date, although it was mentioned that these do not apparently have an expiry date! The team largely use their own tools and equipment and Adrian keeps items such as screw bars which can be clamped to the frame and used to lift bells enough to check bearings. He also has a number of Acro-props which he has used to strengthen weak lifting beams.

It is worth pointing out that the team has worked very closely with bell-hangers, including some members being employed as bell-hangers for a while, so their knowledge is above that which might be expected from the man in the street (or is that “ringer in the tower”??).

# The Kent County Association of Change Ringers Bell Restoration Officer

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*President:  
His Grace The Archbishop of Canterbury.*

Hello Ian,

In reply to your enquiry about how we run things, I will cover the points as you have mentioned them.

Scope of work

This will depend on your labour force. In Kent, we are capable of anything from replacing a stay to a complete installation. It does include routine maintenance work because some towers are in the position of not having anyone to do even the simplest job. We will undertake painting jobs. I have just recently negotiated with the probation service to supply some labour to a church using people on community service to paint their frame. This seems to have gone well as not only did they do the bell frame, a large part of the church was done as well.

Our team are known in the County as 'the heavy gang' and myself as 'Redleader'. We have around 10 in the gang but are often assisted by locals. We also assist the various bell engineers on many projects as this reduces costs on most projects if only one bellhanger is sent. I have been involved with bells for over 40 years and no major project happens unless I am present (ie complete removal or installation of a ring) but other members do smaller jobs in their own areas. I am actually a lecturer in electrical installation but this is linked to the construction industry and so I am well up on much of the legislation here. Another member is a Health and Safety adviser. Others are; a power station engineer, a joiner, a gas engineer, a pilot, another electro mechanical bod, his girlfriend, a retired weighbridge engineer, a fitter. Our gas engineer also does risk assessments. So most are from an engineering background and feel we can claim to be better qualified than most of the bell firms! In terms of training, this is 'on the job'.

Equipment

We have a 1 ton van trailer in which we store our gear. We own all our own lifting gear which is tested and certificated. Our maximum lift would be 2tons through 35 metres. We have 3 long chain blocks 4 pull lifts, various chain slings, a pallet truck, a 1ton hand truck. In addition, we have a collection of ropes, boards, wooden blocks etc. We would only hire special equipment. The trailer can be used to transport bells to about 10cwt.

In terms of the DACs, I am adviser for Rochester and Canterbury. The secretary of Canterbury is also a ringer. We also have one tower in Chichester and a number in Southwark as we cover Greater London that was in Kent.

The bell firms have no problem with us because far from taking work, we are enabling work to be done that wouldn't be done if we didn't help.

The bell restoration fund grants are suggested by our sub-committee to the main committee.

We will give towers advise on fund raising and attend PCC meetings if required.

I have left the most awkward point to last, ie insurance.

For a number of years, we had a policy in place which covered all activities and then suddenly, bell hanging became a bad risk about 4 years ago. Why, we don't know as there has never been a major accident but even Whitechapel had their insurance increased 5 times.

*Ecclesiastical Insurance* cover most churches and in some cases are prepared to cover single projects. We have a county policy which covers maintenance 'to cover works not involving the removal of a bell'.

More recently, we have extended this cover by a single payment to cover a lifting operation for one day. This is something that I would like to get ideas from other groups on and perhaps you could let me have any info you receive in your enquiries.

I have worked with all the 'bell restoration officers' and our operation has been working for almost 50 years and has saved hundreds of thousands of pounds but I fear rules and regulations may stop it.

Have look on the KCACR web page for details of some of our work.

Please let me know if you require any further info or if you have any ideas that might be of interest to us.

Regards,

Brian

Brian G. Butcher (aka Redleader)