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Church bells are the most historic sound many of us ever hear.

We can help you make sure your church bells keep ringing for a long time into the future.

## Download our Guidance

- [Criteria for listing bells](#)
- [Code of Practice: conservation and repair of bells and bellframes](#)
- [Church bells and the law](#)
- [Church Bell Frames: identifying historic significance and preparing reports](#)



G Pledger

# Looking after your bells

Looking after your bells and bell frames is a specialist job. You should hire an experienced bell hanger or founder.

If you are planning to do work on the bells, make sure your specialist follows the Code of Practice. You are more likely to get your faculty and any funding if they do.

The code helps keep bells in use in a way that preserves their historic importance. And it helps you understand the bells that you have and think about what to do with them.

If you think your church's bells are affecting the structure of the tower, consult a professional bell hanger or structural engineer for advice. And don't forget to tell your architect.

## What permissions do you need?

If you are planning to do any work to your bells that is more than routine inspection and maintenance, you will need to apply for permission. If the works are substantial or intended to introduce changes to the bells you will need a [faculty](#).

If the works are about maintaining the bells that are in use, but without any changes to the installation the works are likely to be on [List A or List B](#). For these, you will either need no permission or the written consent of your archdeacon. Talk to your [DAC team](#) for advice.

### List A

Works on List A allow for the routine maintenance and inspection of bells that are:

1. In regular use
2. Where there is a tower captain, or other person, with sufficient skills and knowledge to make sure everything is done with due regard to [health and safety](#) and the protection of historically significant parts of the installation

List A is not appropriate for work when a bell needs to be lifted from its bearings or for making alterations to an installation.

Works on List A can be done without a faculty and without informing your archdeacon.

But if are unsure, contact your [DAC team](#) for advice

### List B

Works in List B require the Archdeacon to be consulted to confirm that a faculty is not needed. The Archdeacon will take advice from the DAC and its bells adviser before giving notice that the proposals may be undertaken without a faculty, or advising that they require a full faculty application.

As with List A, these works should only be carried out by persons with sufficient skills and knowledge to complete the work to a satisfactory standard, with due regard to [health and safety](#) and the protection of historically significant parts of the installation. This may require a bell hanger to carry out or oversee the works.

Although a series of relatively minor works may be all that is necessary to bring an installation back into use, the provisions of List B are principally for bells in regular use. If an installation is being brought back into use after a period of over 5 years a professional bell hanger must be consulted to see that all aspects of the ring are fit for use.

List B includes the installation of electric silent ringing devices. However, it cannot be used for works that require the removal of the bell from the belfry or for works that involve drilling, tuning, or other work that would make a lasting change to the bell.

## Listed bells and bell frames

Bells and bell frames we think are worth preserving are often called listed.

The [Church Buildings Council](#) uses these criteria to decide if a bell or frame should be listed.

**Bells:**

- All bells older than 1600
- Good quality bells from 1600 to 1750
- Bells with special decoration
- Rare bells
- Bells in a group of 4 or more
- Outstanding quality bells from 1750 to 1850
- Significant examples of technical innovation after 1851

**Bell frames:**

- Before 1599; still has a lot of original work
- Post 1600; good quality and structurally complete
- Post 1600; where the date and maker is known
- Post 1600; frame shows technical innovation
- Post 1600; frame shows unusual features

If you think a bell or frame should be listed, please [contact our general enquiries](#).

## Assess the significance and record your bell frames

Before doing any work to your bells or bell frames, you have to:

- Assess their [significance](#)
- Record any historical information
- Get a [faculty](#)

Hire a specialist to help you find out if they are of high historic interest or of little interest.

Together, you can:

### **Conduct an appraisal**

An appraisal brings together the facts about the evolution of the church and its bell frame.

Look for information in:

- The local historic environment record
- The diocesan record [office](#)
- The [Church Heritage Record](#)

### **Assess their significance**

A statement of significance contains:

- A summary of the history and evolution of the church as a whole
- What is known about the bell frame and its relationship to the church
- An estimate of the frame's significance

It will help you determine if the bell frame is of local, regional or national significance.

Find out more about [statements of significance](#)

### **Choose the right level of recording**

There are three different levels of recording. Choosing the one that is right for you depends on:

- The significance of your bell frame
- The type of work you're proposing
- The extent of the work you're proposing

**A Level 1** record is essentially visual in nature, supplementing the written content of the appraisal, and is suitable for bell frames judged to be of local significance.

**A Level 2** record is descriptive and analytical in nature, providing a reasoned and illustrated account of the origins, characteristics and development of the bell frame. It is appropriate for frames judged to be of regional significance.

**A Level 3** record involves a more searching historical analysis and a wider assessment of the context and significance of the bell frame. It will normally be reserved for frames of national significance.

### **Gather evidence**

Include drawings and photographs with your written information.

### Write a final report

A level 2 and 3 report should be prepared by someone with a good understanding of bell frames, bells and belfries (e.g. building archaeologist).

The full report should be written in a way that makes it easily understandable to non-specialists. Keep in mind that this might become the only record of the frame.

## Case study

- [Bell frame - Appraisal - St George the Martyr in Southwark](#) (467.61 KB)
- [Bell frame Level 1 - Recording - St George the Martyr in Southwark](#) (1021.36 KB)
- [Bell frame Level 2 - Recording - St George the Martyr in Southwark](#) (1.37 MB)
- [Bell frame Level 2 - Appendix - St George the Martyr in Southwark](#) (1.86 MB)
- [Bell frame Level 3 - Recording - St George the Martyr in Southwark](#) (2.93 MB)
- [Bell frame Level 3 - Appendix - St George the Martyr in Southwark](#) (1.86 MB)

## Noise complaints and the law

You should be aware of your rights and responsibilities under the law in case someone complains about the ringing of your church's bells or clock bell.

Read the advice of the Legal Advisory Commission of the General Synod

### Ecclesiastical law

Canon F8 of the Church of England says that every church will be given at least one bell to ring the people to service.

The incumbent and the churchwarden both control the ringing of the bells. But no bell should be rung against the incumbent's direction.

### Common law

Ringing bells is a custom. There is no right to do so.

Common law says that making unreasonable noise is actionable as a nuisance.

Ask yourself if you are interfering with someone's right to enjoy their property (e.g. ringing incessantly or at times which most people think is unreasonable). If you are, then damages may be recoverable or an injunction gained in the civil courts.

This is rare.

Short periods of bell ringing for public worship or weddings would not be actionable.

### The Environmental Protection Act 1990

Under section 79 of the Act, any noise that is harmful to people's health, is a nuisance, or interferes excessively with the comfort and convenience of neighbours could be prosecuted in the magistrate's court.

## Who can take action?

Anyone whose enjoyment of their property is being affected.

The courts will consider:

- How close the property is to the church
- And if the person just recently moved into the area knowing there was a church nearby

## How to avoid complaints

1. Ring regularly at known times
2. Fix a pattern for additional ringing (e.g. weddings, visitors, meetings, etc.)
3. Be considerate of your neighbours
4. Publicise special ringing events
5. Maintain good striking
6. Hold open days to make people aware of ringing and the ringers
7. Be reasonable

## Dealing with complaints

If someone makes a complaint:

1. Respond politely and quickly

- Be reasonable and try to reach a friendly solution from the start
- Be prepared to change your ringing pattern to reach a compromise
- Discuss the problem face to face and invite the person to watch the ringing and meet the ringers
- Explain why and when the bells are usually rung. And for how long
- Make sure the clergy, wardens and ringers all work together
- Appoint one spokesperson to avoid confusion
- Take the environmental health officer seriously

2. Keep a written record of complaints and any action taken

3. Seek experienced help

## Advice for closing churches

If your church is closing, you may need to apply for permission to remove and store the bells. Some organisations will even help you find them a new home.

You should try and preserve them whenever possible and not sell them as scrap except as a last resort.

Find out more about furnishings no longer needed for worship



## Also of interest

### Apply for a grant

[Let us help you restore your historic bells](#)

### Learn more about your historic bells

[Search for your church in our heritage database](#)

### Become a bell ringer

[Ask your local church or the Central Council of Church Bell Ringer](#)

### Learn about the rings of bells

[Search the Dove's guide for church bell ringers](#)

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