

BATH AND WELLS DIOCESAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

BELLS AND BELL FRAMES

Code of Practice

All proposals for alterations to bells or bell installations should be prepared with due regard to the Code of Practice ("the Code") published by the Council for the Care of Churches (see note 1 below). In most cases a Faculty will be required for such work, and the Archdeacon should be consulted at an early stage. When major works are being considered it is advisable for parishes to apply for preliminary informal advice to avoid wasting time, money and effort on schemes which are unlikely to obtain approval. Particular attention is drawn to the following matters.

Bells

Proposals to alter a bell (including recasting, repair, re-tuning, drilling, removal of canons) must be justified, and should be accompanied by a technical and historical assessment (see Appendix A1.1 of the Code). Whenever it is proposed to dismantle an old bell from its fittings for any reason it is advisable to consider the removal of the remains of a cast-in iron staple from its crown (Section 2.4 of the Code).

Bell Frames

Proposals for the repair, alteration, or replacement of a bell frame, or any part of it, should be accompanied by a historical evaluation (Section 11 and Appendix A1.3 of the Code), photographs of the frame and justification for the proposed work. An existing frame forms part of the history of the building, and repair should always be considered as the first option. When a historic frame is deemed irreparable or otherwise unsuitable, and replacement is proposed, the old frame ought if possible to be retained. Ideally the frame should remain in situ. If it has to be located elsewhere in the tower, proposals for this should be included in the submission. Scale drawings in plan and elevation of any new frame, or part frame, should also be submitted.

Bell fittings

The age, type, condition and supplier of fittings to be replaced should be stated. Permission will normally be given for the provision of modern fittings for ringing bells. In important cases, approval may be conditional on the retention and display of historic fittings.

Sound Management

1. External Acoustics

Church bells are meant to be heard. Any proposals to make them quieter externally should be very carefully considered, remembering that for many

people the sound of church bells is the much-loved "voice" of the Church in both town and countryside. Where in exceptional circumstances it is considered that some form of external sound control is necessary, the following points are relevant:-

- * Adequate ventilation of the bell chamber is essential to avoid damp conditions leading to damage to the tower structure and to iron and timber work of the bell installation.
- * When conditions permit, the provision of a sound lantern in the roof of the tower is a solution which should be considered.
- * Any blocking of sound exit windows must be completely reversible, and fixing to the tower structure approved by the church architect. Provision is also necessary for the inspection, maintenance and cleaning of the windows.
- * So-called variable sound control systems must be well-designed and engineered to fail safe in the open position. Many such installations have been allowed to remain in the closed position either through mechanical failure, or in manual systems, because it requires less effort by the tower-keeper to leave the shutters closed.
- * In some towers the installation of external sound control has been found to have a detrimental effect on internal acoustics.

2. Internal acoustics

It sometimes happens, after restoration work, that bells are found to be uncomfortably loud in the ringing chamber, usually when there is no intermediate sound-deadening chamber in the tower. Where room permits, a raised floor in the bell chamber or a lower ceiling in the ringing chamber may suffice. A number of proprietary materials are available for insulation of bell chamber floors or ringing chamber ceilings. For example resin-bonded mineral wool provides a clean, water repellent and reasonably effective means of reducing sound levels. Sawdust is not advisable since it can harbour pests and will absorb water leading to long-term damage to timber floors and ceilings.

Clocks, clock chimes and carillons

Before any work is carried out on a bell installation, care must be taken to protect turret clock movements and other machinery from grit and dust arising from the bell work. The proposed bell work must not interfere with any part of the clock or carillon mechanism. If this is not possible the proposals must include specifications for rectification or modification work on the clock by a qualified clock repairer.

Imitations

Mechanical, electrical or electronic imitations of bells are strongly deprecated.

Note 1. "The Code of Practice for the Conservation and Repair of Bells and Bellframes" published by the Council for the Care of Churches in 1993, price £2.95 Available from the CCC, Fielden House, 13 Little College Street, London SW1P 3SH Tel. 0171 898 1866

Note 2: Relevant publications:-

- * "Bellframes - a practical guide to inspection and recording" by C Pickford (1993). Available from the author at 15 Golding Road, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 3NL. Tel. 01732 456147
- * "SPAB Technical Pamphlet 14 - Timber Bell-frames" by A Drew-Edwards and D Lodge (1998). Available from SPAB, 37 Spital Square, London E1 6DY. Tel 0171 377 1644
- * "The Archaeology of Bellframes - Recording and Preservation" edited by C J Brooke (1997). Available from The Institute of Field Archaeologists Buildings Special Interest Group c/o Dr David Thackray, Boxwell Cottage, Mill Bottom, Nailsworth, Stroud, Glos. GL6 0LA price £7.50 post free.

July 1999