

Maintaining Branch towers in good condition

Introduction

The Branch has in the past made financial contributions to PCCs who invest in tower installations. As well as supporting re-hangs the Branch has also supported work such as getting the bells ringable at Sandhurst, improving clapping at Sonning, installing sound control at Twyford and repairing a broken gudgeon at Hurst).

We have also supported the installation or refurbishment of simulators to enhance training facilities. I'm not sure whether they were funded by the PCC or the ringers but either way the Branch was helping to enhance facilities available in the Branch.

Most of those are one-off, or at least very rare events, and Branch support for them will continue to be based on the merits of the case. Where they are planned well ahead the officers will make a recommendation to the AGM but if the work is urgent, the officers can authorise expenditure up to a limit between AGMs.

Maintenance & inspection

A healthy bell installation needs good regular care and maintenance, and the ability to spot any warning signs and either seek advice or take timely remedial action to prevent the problem leading to breakage or failure.

The officers discussed this topic and realised that while we know that some Branch bands have the necessary skills and knowledge we do not know how many do, and therefore whether additional support might be desirable.

Under the quinquennial system church buildings are inspected every five years by an architect. But most architects know very little about bell installations, so the chance that they would spot any incipient problems with a bell installation is quite low. So the absence of reported problems could lead PCCs into a false sense of security.

Several forms of help are already available to bands within the Branch:

- The Guild runs periodic courses on tower maintenance. A band could improve its in-house capability by sending a suitable person on such a course. (The person would need a practical bent but need not be a ringer; a keen member of the church or friend of the band might be interested.)
- The Guild runs the Tower Maintenance Award scheme, which is based on a comprehensive inspection. Entering the scheme is a good way for a band to get an overall view of the state of their tower, and some free advice if appropriate. Details on [ODG website](#).

There is a third alternative:

- Bell-hangers can provide routine maintenance checks (for a fee¹). If a band does not have the skills to maintain the bells then the PCC could buy a professional service to maintain the bells and provide early identification of likely future problems, and advice if further action is needed.

If any Branch towers are in the position of needing this third option, where a PCC needs to spend money to keep a bell installation in good order, then it raises the question of whether the Branch should be willing to provide support, as it does for other investment.

We would welcome the views of those who lead bands within the Branch:

- Does your band have the capability to keep your bells in good order and to know when to seek external advice?
- If not, would you be able to develop that capability by taking advantage of the courses the Guild provides?
- Do you envisage a situation where it would be wise for your PCC to buy professional maintenance?
- Would a financial contribution from the Branch make that more likely?
- Would you support the Branch making financial contributions to maintenance in other towers?

¹ That should not be confused with the free assessment they will provide as part of a bid to undertake major work.