

Binfield ropes

Introduction

Ropes eventually wear out, though how long they last will vary. Rope wear depends on the materials used, the nature of the installation and the amount of use. Rope life can also be extended considerably by good care, and with local repairs made by splicing (providing the relevant skills are available¹).

A new rope can cost up to £200² so a complete set for a tower could cost well over £1000. Under normal circumstances ropes rarely all need replacing at the same time but the average cost over many years can be significant.

Branch towers have 110 ringing bells, so 110 ropes are in service at any one time. If they lasted say an average of 20 years³ each then the replacement cost would be of the order of £5k per annum across the Branch, or a few hundred pounds per tower.

Binfield request

When Binfield replaced its ropes with 'new' (ie unused) spare ropes they were unsatisfactory. They had been bought many years ago and had natural fibre tops rather than the synthetic tops that are now standard. As a result their performance and length varied a lot with the weather.

The ringers decided to have them fitted with new synthetic tops, which greatly improved their performance.. One that had been on longer also needed a new tail end.

The cost was £680 (much less than the cost of new ropes) and in view of the excessive use that the Branch has made of Binfield bells in recent years (nearly 40% of all Branch ringing, and about 20% of the total use of the bells⁴) the band asked the Branch for a contribution towards the cost, suggesting £340 (50% of the total).

The officers discussed the pros and cons of making such a donation.

The officers are recommending a move to paying for the use of towers⁵. If/when that happens then the payment will be expected to offset normal wear and tear, including the cost of periodic rope replacement, so there would be a presumption against making additional payment for ropes unless there are exceptional circumstances.

However, that regime of paying for use is not yet in place, and Branch use of Binfield in recent years has been excessive, so the officers recommend making a payment in this case.

After the officers meeting I calculated what Binfield would have been paid if the proposed payment system had been in place. About 90 practices have been held at Binfield since the pandemic, which would have yielded total payment of £1350 over the four year period (about a fifth of the nominal 20 year life of a rope assumed above).

¹ The Branch runs rope splicing courses. The Guild rope management courses include splicing.

² I don't have any up to date figures, however Binfield paid £113 per rope for new top ends to be added to existing sallies (the most expensive part) and tail ends.

³ I've seen this figure quoted but I don't know whether it relates to single use, ie discard and replace the whole rope as soon as it fails, or to ropes whose life is extended by timely repair by splicing and/or replacing tail ends.

⁴ See separate paper *Payment for the use of towers*

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