

### **Thinking of "Doing Up" Your Bells?**

This article is written as a guide to those who may be planning, or even only thinking about, a restoration of a ring of bells within the dioceses of Llandaff and Monmouth of the Church in Wales. As the officially appointed Bell Consultant to the Diocesan Advisory Committee ("DAC") for each of the two dioceses, I have prepared it because there have been a number of occasions recently where less than best procedure has been followed (even by those from within membership of the Association), mainly I suspect because of an unfamiliarity with what is necessary. What I have written here applies to every Diocese in Wales (and, in essence, also to England).

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Four stages can be identified in any project which seeks to make a change of any sort to a bell installation, and which cannot accurately be described as "routine maintenance". This phrase "routine maintenance" now includes only such minimal work as the replacement of a broken stay or slider or the cleaning down and repainting of rusting metalwork of the frame or fittings. Apparently straightforward work which does, however, require a Faculty are the modification of a "Hastings" type stay to the more traditional stay and slider mechanism, or even the rebushing of a clapper. It is important to remember, too, that changes to the bell frame or the position of the ringing chamber in the tower also come under these provisions.

The four stages are:

1. Determining what needs to be done, or what might be done, and the possible costs involved;
2. Deciding between the various options as to one particular course of action, including its financing;
3. Seeking the necessary ecclesiastical authority (a "Faculty") for carrying out the work;
4. Executing the project through to satisfactory completion, including paying for the work.

In nearly every case (the exceptions are so few that they can safely be ignored), every one of these stages is absolutely essential, and ideally should be followed in the sequence shown above. Omitting any part, carrying it out without the previous stage having been completed, or even trying to proceed in a different sequence, almost certainly will lead to the whole project taking longer than it need and very likely there will be frustration on the part of those who are trying to get the project completed. In a worst case scenario, it could even result in those carrying out the work being personally liable to put everything back into its original condition! In a best case, the stages are obvious, simple and relatively quick.

## **What are the possibilities and likely costs?**

If the project is straightforward and the range of possibilities limited then local ringers' knowledge can sometimes specify and determine the costs of the various options without further investigation. Usually, though, it is worth inviting one of the professional firms to visit the tower and give their advice. Always ensure that at least three firms are involved (to ensure that the full range of possibilities is considered and that quotes are competitive). If you are seeking a particular course of action tell them what you have in mind. They will need to visit the tower. Some may make a charge to cover the expenses of their visit and the preparation of a report on the condition of the installation. These different reports are absolutely essential at later stages, so you should not proceed without obtaining them. And keep all of them available for others to consult, for they may well be complementary: one may notice that a bell is cracked while the others could miss this, another may notice and comment on the deficiency of the design of the frame, while the third could make radically different recommendations as to the tonality of one or more bells and the need for any retuning. (Retuning of bells and frame replacement are particularly sensitive issues when it comes to the later stages and the arguments for proceeding with this irreversible process need to be carefully rehearsed.) Current addresses and telephone numbers of competent firms can always be supplied by the Association's Secretary, but it is up to the church concerned to make its own choice of three (or more, although too many can cause confusion and involve needless expense). In addition to the report on the installation, each response will normally include one or more estimates, at current prices, of the various ways of proceeding. You are strongly advised that obtaining only one estimate is not in your own interests.

At this stage, it may be worth taking advice. There is technical expertise available within the membership of our Association. Early consultation with the Secretary of the DAC is also suggested so that the Bell Consultant can be made aware of the intention to do the work and he can familiarise himself with the issues at stake. Unless it is specifically requested, though, he will not intervene in any discussions involving this or the next stage; his involvement really comes later. If there has been liaison with the DAC from early on then this will make sure that delays in that forum will be kept to a minimum - but no-one else will relieve you of the task of deciding what you want to do!

## **What precisely shall we do? How much will it cost? How are we to get the money?**

Perhaps this is the most difficult stage of any project. It is certainly the most important. It will involve deciding the merits of the various recommendations, and may entail several further rounds of discussions with the possible contractors in order to get revised estimates. The sooner a fundamental decision is made about precisely what is to be done, even in broad terms, the easier subsequent decisions will be. It is helpful at this stage to write down for your own reference the considerations which influenced your conclusion, for it is often the case that, subsequently, when new alternative courses of action present themselves you can easily ignore a key issue (such as the likely unavailability of money) which was believed to constrain the choices at the time.

If at this stage the comments of the DAC's Bell Consultant would be helpful in understanding any technical differences between the options, do not hesitate to seek them - but he will need to see the various reports referred to above. He may wish also to inspect the bells himself if he is unfamiliar with any aspect of what might be done or of the condition of the tower. Alternatively, there may be ringers from a nearby tower who

will give this advice, but do make sure that they know the considerations likely to be involved in stage 3 below. Certainly, other ringers' experience with contractors will be helpful in knowing what to watch out for. And do involve your church architect at this point if he hasn't already been involved in the scheme.

In determining the overall costs you will have to decide now exactly what the work will be. Remember to allow for the cost of associated work to the tower, for this may involve other contractors such as a local builder. Don't overlook the cost of opening up trapways in order to remove and reinstall the bells. Or the cost of any modifications to the ringing chamber (such as moving into a new position in the tower, or for providing emergency lighting). Or the cost of work that could be done regarding sound control. Make a draft plan of the likely timetable of work. Check to make sure whether any legislation applies (for example, the health and safety aspects of the 1994 Construction (Design and Management) "CDM" regulations) and that a plan is drawn up accordingly. Obtain a definite quotation for precisely the work you have decided upon from any contractor you have not ruled out for some reason already and find out for how long it will be valid. Prepare a schedule of all likely costs and then allow an amount for contingency: make it 5% or even 10%, especially if the delay between the date of quotations and the likely completion date is not predictable. Find out about the payment profile which the preferred contractors (for the various aspects of the work) will require.

You will need to consider how the money might be raised, for this usually has a dramatic impact on what can be achieved. Speak to others who have undertaken projects of a similar scale of cost and see how they managed to raise their funds. The Association has a Bell Restoration Fund and usually it will provide some help. There are other grant-making bodies which may be of assistance. Funds often come from completely unexpected sources (such as well-wishers in the locality, or even generous members of the ringing fraternity). Don't forget the use of Covenants or Gift Aid, nor interest-free loans from sympathetic members of the congregation. This is not an article on how to raise money, but this aspect must be fully considered and grant-making bodies usually need to know the expected costs before deciding upon any offer of grant.

Now is decision time. Which firm is to do the work? You may need a Committee to come to this conclusion. Often a small one will mean that everyone can be fully aware of the issues involved. On the other hand you may feel that only the PCC can decide. At the very final stage, however, it should be the PCC and the Incumbent who make the decision to go ahead to the next step.

### **Obtaining a faculty**

It is the experience of both DACs, particularly recently, that parishes have often not fully thought out their projected bell schemes at the time the PCC formally applies for a Faculty, particularly when it is remembered that such application has to be publicised on the church noticeboard for a period of 28 days. The Faculty application to the DAC Secretary should be supported by a formal quotation for the work proposed, together with copies of all the reports which were considered when arriving at the decision about which way to proceed. While the involvement of the DAC, through its Bell Consultant, is certainly encouraged in the earlier stages - as indicated above - is helpful and obviates the need for too much detail at this stage, the act of applying for a Faculty too soon, or in too vague terms, or without any supporting documentation at one stage or another, does not give the DAC the necessary information on which it can make its recommendation to the Diocesan Chancellor about whether the Faculty should be issued.

It is at a DAC meeting that other interested parties (that is others than the proponents, who are often most

influenced by what the ringers seek to accomplish) can have their comments and viewpoints considered. It is here that the conservation lobby can have its input: indeed consideration of their views is an integral part of the formal procedure. In theory at least, the Representative Body can also have some input to this decision making process. There is an important Code of Practice which was published by the Church of England's Council for the Care of Churches in 1993 and which had input from the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers. This Code also has *de facto* acceptance in Wales and making sure that the proposed work conforms to its provisions will strongly argue in favour that the work be recommended. Nevertheless, sometimes there will be need for further clarification of some aspect of the work proposed; or a parish will be asked to consider a modified way of proceeding which more closely follows that Code. In the end, the DAC has to come to a conclusion about the application. Note, however, that the DAC does not make the decision. It merely recommends and, if in the final analysis a parish wishes to pursue with a Faculty application which the DAC does not support, then the relative merits of the two cases will have to be the subject of a Consistory Court hearing. Eventually, the Chancellor is the person who makes the final decision of granting or refusing the Faculty, and he does so either upon the DAC's recommendation if that is uncontested or upon the basis of the evidence presented in Consistory Court.

Work must not be allowed to commence unless a relevant Faculty has been issued. Moreover, the task of reinstating a church to its original condition may be required, and at their own personal expense, of those who have authorised alteration work if it was undertaken without a Faculty; such is enforceable by law. Note that the granting of a Faculty does not thereby also give a parish the right to dispose of any property. In almost all cases the contents of our churches belong to the Representative Body of the Church in Wales. Separate procedures have to be followed before anything is disposed of, and this includes the sale of redundant bells and of bell frames which are unwanted but still serviceable.

### **Completing the project**

The final stage, that of raising the money and undertaking the work, now follows. In such a simple sentence is wrapped many man-hours of work and this is often the most tiring phase, especially if local help is enlisted to keep costs down. Equally it is the most exciting period, for now the results begin to be apparent. It remains for the payments to be made at the due time, the progress of the work to be monitored, and the final outcome to be accepted. Grant-making bodies will often wish to reserve the right to carry out their own inspection of the completed work before passing over grant moneys, especially if the amount is large or the work particularly interesting, and so do allow for possible delays in receiving this part of the promised income. Also, the Incumbent and Churchwardens must certify to the Diocese that the work has been done, and that the details are recorded in the church's Log Book, Terrier and Inventory.