



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Bells and Bell frames: Guidelines for consultation

The notes on this page explain the context within which English Heritage will offer advice on proposals affecting bells and bell frames. Overleaf there is more information about consultation and specific works. All English Heritage advice is based on *Conservation Principles*¹

English Heritage wishes to encourage continuity in use of historic bells and bell frames and thereby the tradition of change ringing². The Council for the Care of Churches, (now the Church Buildings Council), has drawn up a Code of Practice³ for the conservation and repair of bells and bell frames, and congregations are advised to consult this document and all interested parties (including English Heritage) at an early stage, before proposals are developed too far. These days bells of historic significance are scheduled for preservation by the CBC and lists are regularly updated. The CBC also schedules historic bellframes but much less research has been carried out on these and there remains a common tendency to replace them as they become decayed or are deemed unsuitable for modern requirements.

English Heritage will start from a presumption in favour of the retention of historic bells and bell frames, preferably in use. As with all proposals for major change, we would expect proposals for historic installations to be accompanied by Statements of Significance and Need. Assessment of the significance of the existing installation should take account of its rarity, completeness, the quality of the work, known dates and maker, and whether the frame is contemporary with the tower. As always with significant historic fabric, careful repair is preferable to replacement. Even when a frame becomes redundant, perhaps on account of augmentation of the ring, it is often possible to leave it and its supporting foundation beams in situ. Where historic fittings or fabric are to be removed or adapted, we would wish to see the damage minimised and any necessary provision made for recording.

Proposals to upgrade or replace bell installations are sometimes accompanied by the creation of new ringing floors (often driven by a desire to introduce other facilities in the tower area). In such cases provision should be made to allow for the safe and easy removal of the bells for the purposes of future repair. Access to new ringing floors should avoid damage to historic fabric, for example, by the provision of safe ladder or stair access within the tower area. In some cases, space or other considerations make this practically difficult and the formation of a new opening from an existing tower stair might be proposed. Such proposals should be assessed on the relative weight of the stated need (and the availability of non-destructive alternative solutions) measured against the significance of the fabric affected. In older churches, tower areas are often among the least 'restored' parts of the building and the sensitivity of the historic fabric to major intervention may be accordingly stronger.

¹ *Conservation Principles* http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/inspired/upload/pdf/Conservation_Principles_A4%5B1%5D.pdf?1239265168

² *New Work in Historic Places of Worship* http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/upload/pdf/PLACES_OF_WORSHIP_WEB.pdf?1239197081

³ *The Conservation and Repair of Bells and Bellframes: Code of Practice* Church House Publishing ISBN: 0 7151 7599 8



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Most bells and bell frames are in places of worship and may therefore be subject to the Ecclesiastical Exemption. In situations where bells and frames are in buildings not used for worship, or in non exempted places of worship, listed building consent will be required. In either case, the circumstances in which EH should be consulted are explained below. EH expert advisers may, of course, need to advise on wider matters in particular cases.

For Grade I and II* churches, EH would wish to comment on:

- i. Removal or alteration of the bell frame.
- ii. Removal or alteration of the bell frame floor or foundation beams.
- iii. Removal or alteration of other floors in the tower.
- iv. The insertion of new foundation beam arrangements.
- v. Alterations to the layouts for bells, especially two tier augmentations, likely to affect the structure or historic fabric of the tower.
- vi. New access arrangements to tower floors, especially modifications to spiral stairs.
- vii. Infill to belfry openings.

For Grade II churches, EH would wish to comment on:

- i. Total removal of the bell frame.
- ii. Total removal of the bell frame floor or foundation beams.
- iii. Total removal of other floors in the tower.

For all churches, EH would *not* normally wish to comment on

- i. Any work to the bells, (e.g. new bearings, new headstocks, taking out of service, removal of canons, crown staple removal, drilling for bell bolts and tuning).
- ii. Any work to the clock including the weights shaft.
- iii. Rope Guides.

Works associated with bells and bell frames in listed buildings

EH would normally expect to comment on any works associated with the proposed works to the bells or bell frame, in addition to and independently from the works to the bells and bell frame. e.g.

- i. The relocation of a font or memorial stones from within the tower as part of a wider scheme to accommodate a new ringing floor or other facilities
- ii. Structural repairs to the tower
- iii. Insertion of a new ringing gallery

For further information contact English Heritage regional offices

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