

Surrey Association – Belfry Maintenance Proposal

Background

- The Association has some 70 installations of bells spread throughout the location, with some in urban settings and others in rural settings.
- Some of the towers are well maintained and do not need any form of belfry maintenance, but several towers could need maintenance work for the following reasons:
 - o No available steeple keeper in the band
 - o Access to the tower/bells is difficult
 - o Bells are odd struck because clappers need oiling and resetting
 - o There may be loose nuts or cracked stays which need attention
 - o Ropes may also need attention
 - o Other items which may be a health or safety hazard e.g. faulty electrics
 - o Ingress of dirt or water or birds which may be impacting on the go of the bells
- Most churches have maintenance contracts with organ builders to tune and maintain the organ, and with a clock maker to maintain the church clock but very few have maintenance contracts with bell engineers to maintain the bells, typically because a member of the band has done this for no cost to the church.
- The closure of the Whitechapel bell foundry will make it harder for London towers to obtain quick running repairs, so regular maintenance is more desirable.
- Attracting and training new recruits would be much easier on bells which are well maintained and nicely struck

Proposal

- The Association has received a significant legacy and some of this could be used as grants to enable towers to request annual maintenance visits from a qualified bell engineer.
- The annual maintenance visit would be carried out by a first class steeple keeper and could typically include the following:
 - o Check bell frame and connections to the tower
 - o Identify any significant areas of decay or corrosion to the bell frame
 - o Note presence of water ingress or entry by birds
 - o Check for build-up of dust or guano that could be detrimental to health
 - o Inspect and note the condition of the bells and ringing fittings
 - o Check and tighten all fixings to the ringing fittings as required
 - o Lubrication of moving parts as required
 - o Cleaning of dust and dirt from sliders and slider runner boards
 - o Check the condition of the bell ropes
 - o Ring up all bells and test
 - o Submit a brief written report noting what was found, what work was carried out, and listing any outstanding work which is required
- We requested quotes from respected bell hangers in the UK for a typical maintenance visit with two bell engineers:
 - o Nicholson's costs £350 - £400 + VAT
 - o Whites of Appleton £xx but have 5 month lead time
- A local steeple keeper could attend the visit to be able to help and learn from the visit
- The legacy could pay a proportion of this cost say £300 with the balance paid by the local tower or PCC

- 20 such visits in Surrey would therefore cost £6,000 in one year. This sum was approved by the General Committee on 28 March.
- This work could be managed by the Bell Restoration Committee or a new Bell Maintenance Committee could be formed ideally with qualified engineers.
- Towers/PCCs would be invited to submit requests for maintenance visits to encourage the work to proceed. The grant would apply to the first visit to a tower but PCCs would have to take responsibility for future maintenance visits.
- We would ideally arrange these in 2s or 3s to enable the bell hangers to do them in one day
- Following the visit, the bell hangers will submit a report detailing any further maintenance or corrective work that needs doing.
- This could be referred to the Bell Restoration Committee for action and is out of the scope of the grant from the legacy.
- This will be presented to the AGM on 13 May

P J Flavell

12 April 2017