

Maintenance of Branch towers

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

Many towers have a Steeple Keeper (possibly combined with another role such as Tower Captain) who has the necessary knowledge and skills to perform this function at no cost.

Following a concern that not all Branch towers might have been in this position, the November Business meeting agreed that we should conduct a small survey to establish the current situation.

Survey

The survey asked:

- If the tower had a steeple keeper (or equivalent), and whether someone was interested to become one.
- If the bell installation had had a systematic check in last 12 months
- If the band was aware of tower maintenance courses run by the Guild
- If the band was aware of the Guild Tower Maintenance Awards and had ever entered for one
- If the band felt the PCC would pay a professional to keep the installation safe and ringable if needed
- If they would approve of Branch grants to PCCs at other towers towards such costs

Results

The results are encouraging:

- All but one band has a steeple keeper (or equivalent). That band relies on help from a neighbouring band.
- Several bands have another person interested in steeple keeping, helping to ensure succession.
- All but two towers had a comprehensive check in the last year, and at one of them someone 'keeps an eye on things'.
- All those asked are aware of the Guild maintenance courses, and several members have attended
- Only one person wasn't aware of the Guild Tower Maintenance Awards (which include a free assessment)
- Four bands had entered for a Maintenance Award at least once.
- About half of those asked felt their PCC would pay for professional support if needed to maintain the bells.
- All those asked would support the Branch paying a PCC for professional maintenance, though two felt it would depend on the circumstances and the amount.

Conclusions

The above presents a fairly healthy situation. All towers either have a band member performing the function of steeple keeper or they have access to someone who can do so at the moment there appears to be no need for professional support with routine maintenance of Branch towers, but if it ever were necessary there is strong support for the Branch being willing to help fund it, in the same way that the Branch has always supported major repair and restoration work.

Some towers are more systematic than others in their approach to maintenance. The best way to avoid major problems is a thorough regular check for tightness, free movement and signs of wear or damage. Being observant, and being sensitive to unusual behaviour of bells or ropes is a useful extra but less likely to avert problems than a regular systematic check.

I would recommend those bands that have not already done so to consider the a Guild Tower Maintenance Award. It provides a free critical assessment of the tower and bells, backed up with friendly advice on where improvements could be made. Getting a certificate to hang on the wall is a nice bonus.