

University Ringing



Your tower- Steeple keeping

Produced by the CCCBR Young Ringers Workgroup

Last updated: July 2026 | university.ringing@cccbr.org.uk

Introduction

This article aims to guide those new to managing and taking care of their tower or looking for some tips if this is their first time being steeple keeper; regardless of whether this is a local tower or university tower.

This is just a general introductory guide, and much more in-depth information can be found on the Central Council website, under the 'your tower' section in the University ringing portion of the Young Ringer's Hub ([Introduction • Belfry Upkeep](#)).

1. What is the role of a steeple keeper?

The role of a steeple keeper is to maintain the tower and the bells, including maintaining cleanliness and organisation of the ringing room, and maintaining the bells themselves, making sure they are in suitable working order and that anything that is broken or damaged is fixed.

1.1 The ringing room

- Should be kept clean and as dust free as possible!
- Trip hazards should be minimised, for example storing boxes tidily and outside commonly walked paths, ensuring any wires (rope warmer, simulator, fans etc) are out of the way, and keeping doorways and emergency exits clear at all times
- Domestic tasks should be carried out such as Hoovering, taking any bins out, and returning things back to their original place should they be moved
- Peel boards should be maintained, and in the event of a new one being acquired, the tower should get a faculty from the church (permission to install the peel board as any permanent alterations to the church as a structure, e.g. drilling, nails in the wall, require permission from the church which is called a faculty) before installation

1.2 The bells

- Ropes maintained and replaced when frayed or worn
- Regular inspection of the bells to ensure they are in an appropriate condition to be rung
- Any broken stays, sliders etc should be replaced- This can be done without PCC involvement, but for other, larger work the church should be involved as you may need to ask them for funding etc.

- This document created by BUSCR highlights all the basic maintenance and checks that should be done regularly to maintain correct working order of the bells: [BUSCR Steeple Checks](#)

**TIP**

Some of these tasks can feel quite mundane, so why not enlist the help of others? Organising a time before/ after a practise where all can get involved to help clean up will be much less time consuming and dull, plus it helps others to understand their responsibility to help the steeple keeper by taking responsibility and care of their tower!

2. Safety and assistance

When working with bells it is important that maintenance is carried out in a safe and proper manner.

2.1 Safety first

- When working with the bells, even when they are 'safe' in their down position (for which it is paramount that they should always be when working among them) you should never be working alone; always ensure that there is someone with you, even if they are not helping with the work
- Appropriate clothing and gear should be worn when working in the belfry. Thick clothing and shoes, ideally steel toe-capped boots if owned should be worn, nothing that could get snagged or ripped if caught on a loose pin or screw. Gloves are ideal for hand protection, and if you are observing the bells while they're being rung, proper ear defenders are a non-negotiable. Additionally, if it is dusty or there has been a Pigeon incursion it is recommended that you wear a mask as inhaling the dust/Pigeon excrement, even accidentally, can make you seriously ill

2.2 Assistance

If this is your first time acting as steeple keeper for your tower or society, it may feel a bit daunting! Fear not however, as there is plenty you can do to help feel more familiar and settled with the bells:

- Shadow your predecessor: If you are aware that you are going to be taking over the role from someone else, ask them if you can shadow them working in the belfry, that

way you can see how to work with your bells, and get familiarity knowing that someone who knows the bells well is with you

- Enlist local steeple keepers: One church is never too far from another! Why not ask a steeple-keeping friend to give you an introduction on basic steeple-keeping, and ask them to lend you a hand on work you need to carry out?
- Enlist the help of friends: Again, this is a good way to help other member of your tower or society feel more comfortable and connected with the bells, so once you are feeling more comfortable working with the bells, you can ask willing friends to assist you, especially if any are keen engineers or trade workers!
- Ensure there is a reporting system: Sometimes you may come across an issue you do not feel comfortable taking responsibility to handle (e.g. broken lights or electrical work) or there is serious damage which needs to be reported to the church to fix asap! So, make sure you have a way of reporting and communicating this to the church and society officers so that issues can be resolved promptly and effectively

**TIP**

Sourcing stays and sliders may feel confusing at first, but you'd be surprised how many bellringers make them! Ask around local towers as someone must be making stays for them!

3. Conclusion

Overall, steeple keeping can be an incredibly fun and rewarding position! The upkeep of tower bells is both a responsibility and a privilege for any first-time steeple keeper. Regular inspection, careful maintenance, and prompt attention to signs of wear will help preserve the bells, fittings, and ringing equipment for future generations. By developing a routine maintenance schedule, keeping accurate records, and seeking advice from experienced bell specialists when needed, a steeple keeper can ensure the safe and reliable operation of the tower. As stated at the beginning, this is just a general introductory guide, and much more in-depth information can be found on the Central Council website, under the 'your tower' section in the University ringing portion of the Young Ringer's Hub ([Introduction • Belfry Upkeep](#)).